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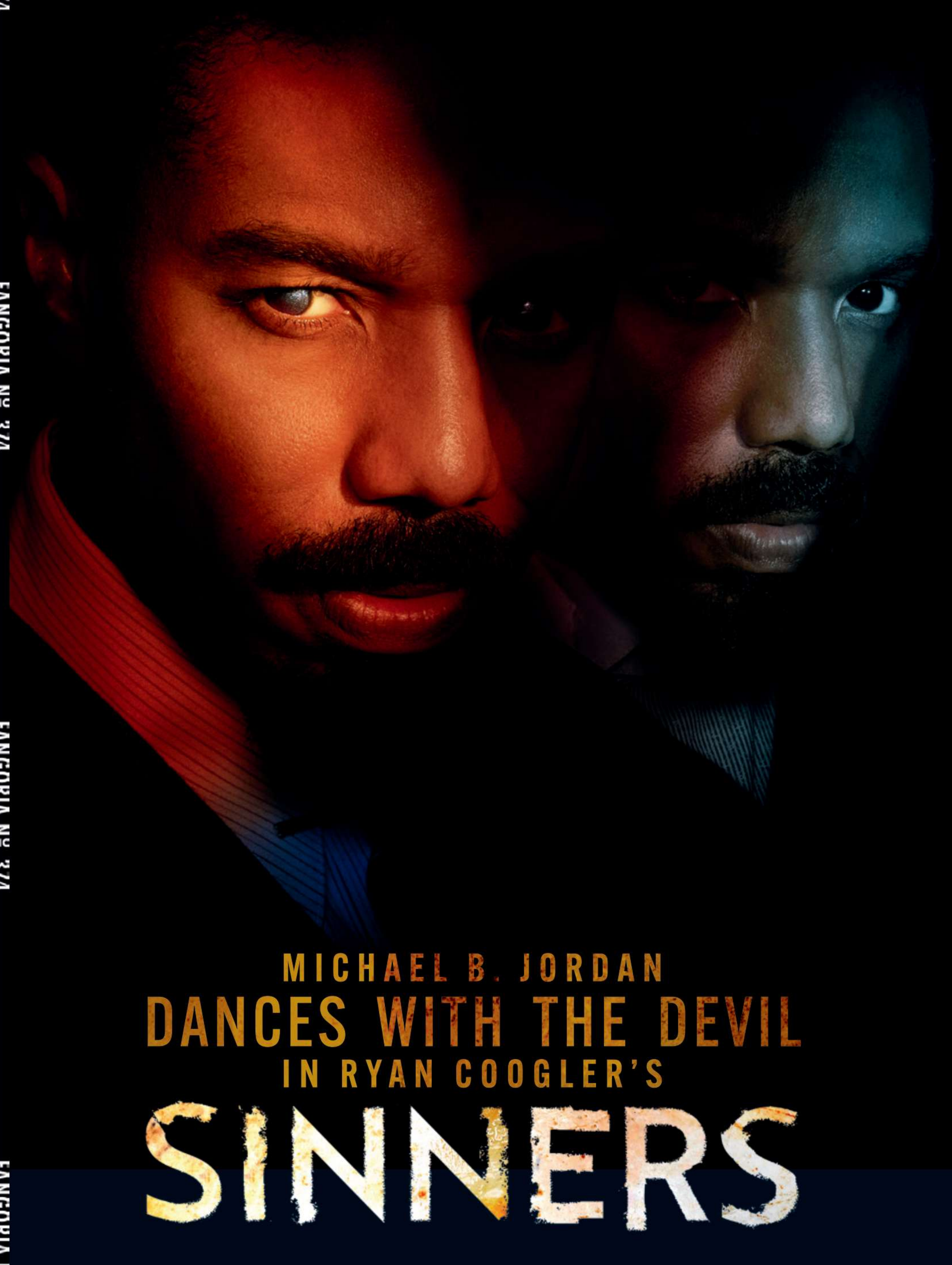

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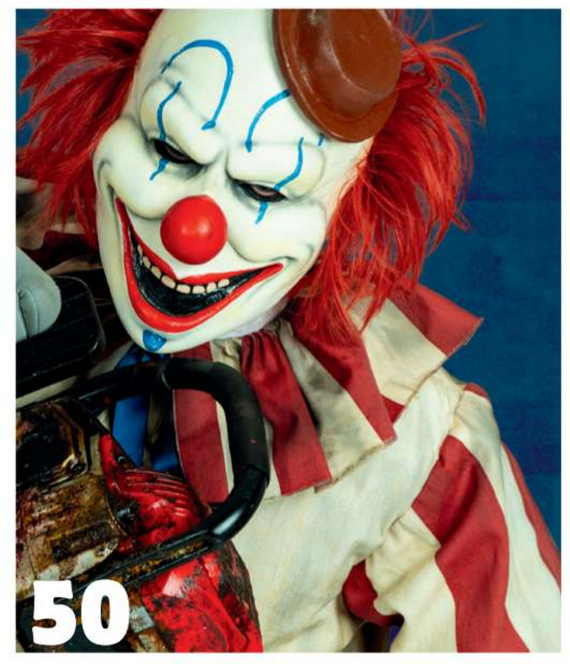

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This issue is dedicated to Kenny Frye, Gene Hackman, David Johansen, David Lynch, and Michelle Trachtenberg.

ALL UNCREDITED PHOTOS FROM FANGORIA VAULT

INVOCATION

Good Grief

A "bucket list" is a great thing framed by a terrible thing. It refers to a series of items one wants to accomplish before kicking that eponymous pail, and in this issue I'm crossing one off: I finally interviewed David Cronenberg. I wrapped the interview with a note of gratitude that, not that long ago, we thought we were done getting new David Cronenberg movies. "I'll try to keep 'em coming," the 82-year-old director told me with a laugh.

The laugh, of course, being a dark, tacit acknowledgement of his finite time left on earth.

And it was a chuckle with yet *another* layer on it, because his new film *The Shrouds* is explicitly informed by the death of his wife, and the yawning chasm of grief that followed. It was also not lost on me that, two years ago, Fango contributor Brittany Knupper wrote in these very pages about the cancer that would eventually kill her two months later, and she wrote about it through the lens of Cronenberg's work.

Upon seeing Cronenberg processing his wife's death by cancer through his new film, the person whose opinion I wanted to hear more than anyone else's was Brittany's widower, my friend Devin. I showed it to him, and Devin declared the film nothing less than "a masterpiece… An accurate and complete portrayal of the surreal horror of grief… There's a darkness in grief of which Cronenberg is unafraid."

Death and grief are, alas, looming around every corner of this issue, and it's not all the fun, *Final Destination* kind. Beyond the layers provided by *The Shrouds*, our subscriber cover (by Matt Ryan Tobin) honors the great David Lynch, whose passing earlier this year galvanized just about every corner of the film community in a shared moment of loss. Elsewhere in this issue, we're proud to publish my late friend Scott Wampler's last bit of writing, visiting the set of Mike Flanagan's Stephen King adaptation, *The Life of Chuck* (a film that was posthumously dedicated to him). So it goes.

It's been a weird year in which we at Fango have lost folks both closely, fiercely loved, and deeply revered from afar. We've responded to these losses as best we can, up to and including honoring them here. I'm not always sure I'm doing it right, or doing all right, but it's all coming from, I think, the right place. Or at least a good one.

It's a messy process, this grief thing, as my friend Devin has observed in his life and in Cronenberg's latest, which he accurately notes "lays bare the insane ways you think and act in mourning. And there, amidst the madness and the moldy bodies, is a truth about the totality of love."

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

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I KNOW I'M HUMAN

Technology recently seems to have taken the upper hand and warped the platforms I have become addicted to. I SO appreciate print media – not JUST because it's how I pay my bills – but because it still feels like a human being is driving it, warts and all. I worry about the future of print, but when I can casually page through an issue of FANGORIA, enjoy the photos and not have an ad pop-up on top of it all - that's a win that creates value.
- Mark Fearing

Mark, obviously I agree. And it occurred to me recently that, whatever horror brand you're getting your fix from these days – us, Rue Morgue, HorrorHound, Bloody Disgusting, Shudder, Screambox, *etc. – you're getting an experience curated by humans. That's not only cool, that's becoming increasingly rare in the modern media landscape. Let's not take it for granted. - PN*

COOL SUBSCRIBER SHIT

I don't care: I'm 54 and I'm going to fanboy out just a little bit. I just got off a Zoom call where I not only got to ask Lloyd Kaufman a couple questions but got to call him Uncle Lloyd. The man behind some of the best movies I grew up with. Amazing. - Jack VanFossen

Jack, I'm so glad you got to have that moment (and it's always great to see you on the subscriber calls, my friend)! For the rest of you, let me take Jack's note here as an opportunity to plug that with your subscription comes access to a robust, subscribers-only community (run by the amazing Kimberly L.), and that community gets to have, among other things, Zoom hangs with Lloyd Kaufman and other legends. Get on board! - PN

CHEERS FOR JIMMY

A few months back I had an exchange with your Operations Manager Jimmy Shaw. I needed to cancel my auto-renew and was likely oversharing about my reasoning behind it. I want you to know that Jimmy's advice and kind words in response to that are still fondly remembered. It meant a lot, and I really do appreciate it. - Mike Natale

Mike, we get messages every week from customers about how incredible Jimmy is, and I can't say they're ever a surprise. Always level-headed, quick to respond with a solution, and (as you witnessed yourself) a kind heart with time to give anyone and everyone a sympathetic ear, Jimmy is a gem and we're lucky he's on the team. I literally do not know how we'd do any of this without him. - PN

WELCOME BACK TO THE FOLD

I discovered FANGORIA when I walked into a bookstore in 1979. I was 13. Fango #2 was my first magazine. It cost 2 bucks. I was hooked and fell in love with horror films. I'd buy them every month and take them to school. Over time I lost them. I rediscovered FANGORIA online a couple of years ago and I'm glad I did. I just received my first physical copy (vol 2 #26) and can't wait to read it. I feel like a kid again. - Rafael Navarro

Rafael, we're overjoyed that you've come back to Fango and found it something worth your time and money. We'll do our best to earn both. - PN

NIGHT-NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

Just wondering if I'm the only horror fan who falls asleep to horror movies... or horror comedies before bed? Currently don't have the guts to try falling asleep to the more serious horror. As for the current horror comedy I fall asleep to, it's *Slotherhouse*. Starting next month it'll be *Critters 2*. - Brice Davenport

Brice, I've been known to doze off to Joe Bob's second feature on The Last Drive-In, *but that's a me/2am issue; nothing to do with the movies. That said, the soft film grain of the 1970s has been known to lull me to sleep now and again, but if I WANT to drift off while watching something? Give me 1930s/40s horror any day. - PN*

MONSTER INVASION

L-R: DIRECTOR DAVID YAROVESKY, NEIL MCBRIDE, BILL SKARSGÅRD AS EDDIE AND SIR ANTHONY HOPKINS AS WILLIAM.

By Amber T

LOCKED IN WITH DAVID YAROVESKY

THE DIRECTOR OF *BRIGHTBURN* GETS BEHIND THE WHEEL OF A NEW VEHICULAR THRILLER.

David Yarovesky is a director that knows a thing or two about lulling an audience into a false sense of security. In *Brightburn*, the traditional superhero narrative is twisted into something far more sinister. In *Nightbooks*, an unassuming elevator serves as a transition point between two worlds. And in his latest thriller *Locked*, a sleek and shiny SUV transforms from heavenly dream car into hell on wheels.

Locked's logline alone should be enough to get you invested. Sir Anthony Hopkins – playing a role that's part Hannibal Lecter, part John Kramer – locks an unsuspecting, bleach-blond Bill Skarsgård in his vehicle and tortures him for a tight 90 minutes. Strap in for Fango's conversation with the filmmaker.

So *Locked* is technically a remake of the 2019 Argentinian thriller *4x4*. But your thrill ride goes off road from the source material.

My favorite kind of remakes are the ones that feel like a different artist took a different direction with the story. I love how Cronenberg's *The Fly* feels very much like David Cronenberg made *The Fly*. *Dawn of the Dead*'s remake is another great example of a movie that, while connected in concept, becomes wildly different in execution. That's exactly what I aimed to do here. I saw *4X4* once and I loved it; I thought they did a tremendous job telling that story. But I never wanted to watch it again because I didn't want it to influence me anymore. I wanted you to feel my voice, my weirdness, my tone, my cinematography. That was a really organic process. I was chasing realism, trying to make the experience as authentic as possible. The moment the viewer thinks 'That would never happen,' it becomes less tense. You relax because you've woken up briefly from that dream state and are reminded that you're watching a movie. I didn't want you to have any relief from the nightmare.

A film like *Locked* lives and dies by the strength of its leads, and

PHOTOS COURTESY THE AVENUE ENTERTAINMENT & RAIMI PRODUCTIONS

it's no surprise that Hopkins and Skarsgård are perfect as, respectively, the sadistic yet morally-concerned older gent and the lovable scumbag. Talk about those casting choices.

The name Anthony Hopkins came up very early, but in the context of, 'Wouldn't that be amazing? It won't happen, but let's try!' So we sent him the script, and I flew to New York for something. The next day, I get a call: 'Anthony wants to meet for breakfast tomorrow.' So I flew back to L.A. for breakfast and by the time I was on the plane back to New York, Anthony and I were writing each other long emails, going back and forth, almost like pen pals – discussing the character, the morality of the story, the motivations, etc. Through all those conversations, we built the character for him.

Bill and I had a shared playlist on Spotify of music we thought [his character] Eddie would listen to. One day, Bill was sitting on a ferry, trapped in his car, and he filmed himself singing along to this jazz music. We'd go back and forth on his hair, tattoos – everything! The characters we created were so inspired by the actors and our conversations. I cannot imagine this movie with anyone else. Both of them were incredible.

***Locked* serves as further proof that Skarsgård is one of the most versatile actors in the genre space. His turn as Eddie Barrish is more Pete Davidson**

than Pennywise, and it's hard to believe this is the same man who so recently played a rotten 19th-century Transylvanian nobleman. Physically, he spends a good portion of the movie alone, acting against Hopkins' voice through the car's speaker. That had to be a challenge, no?

Sometimes I'd taunt him as William [Hopkins], sometimes our 1st AD would read the lines – whatever worked for the day. It was challenging, but he killed it. We've seen Bill be Pennywise, we've seen him be Orlok, but we've never seen him be a fuckboy before! This is a new flavor for Bill, and I think he shows what a fucking movie star he is.

Every opportunity I had, I tried to give Bill a little assistance, and we tried to avoid greenscreen as much as possible. We really strapped him into the car and had stunt drivers whip him around. In a certain scene where he had to wretch, I hid *surströmming* [a disgusting canned fish famous for making people throw up at the smell] to get the most authentic reaction possible. We really put Bill through hell on this movie, and I think you can feel it in his performance.

As the old adage goes, all art is political, and even more so in a cultural climate as tense as it is in 2025, where the divide between classes grows more cavernous every day. In *Locked*, some thrive and others merely survive. What was the thematic intent there?

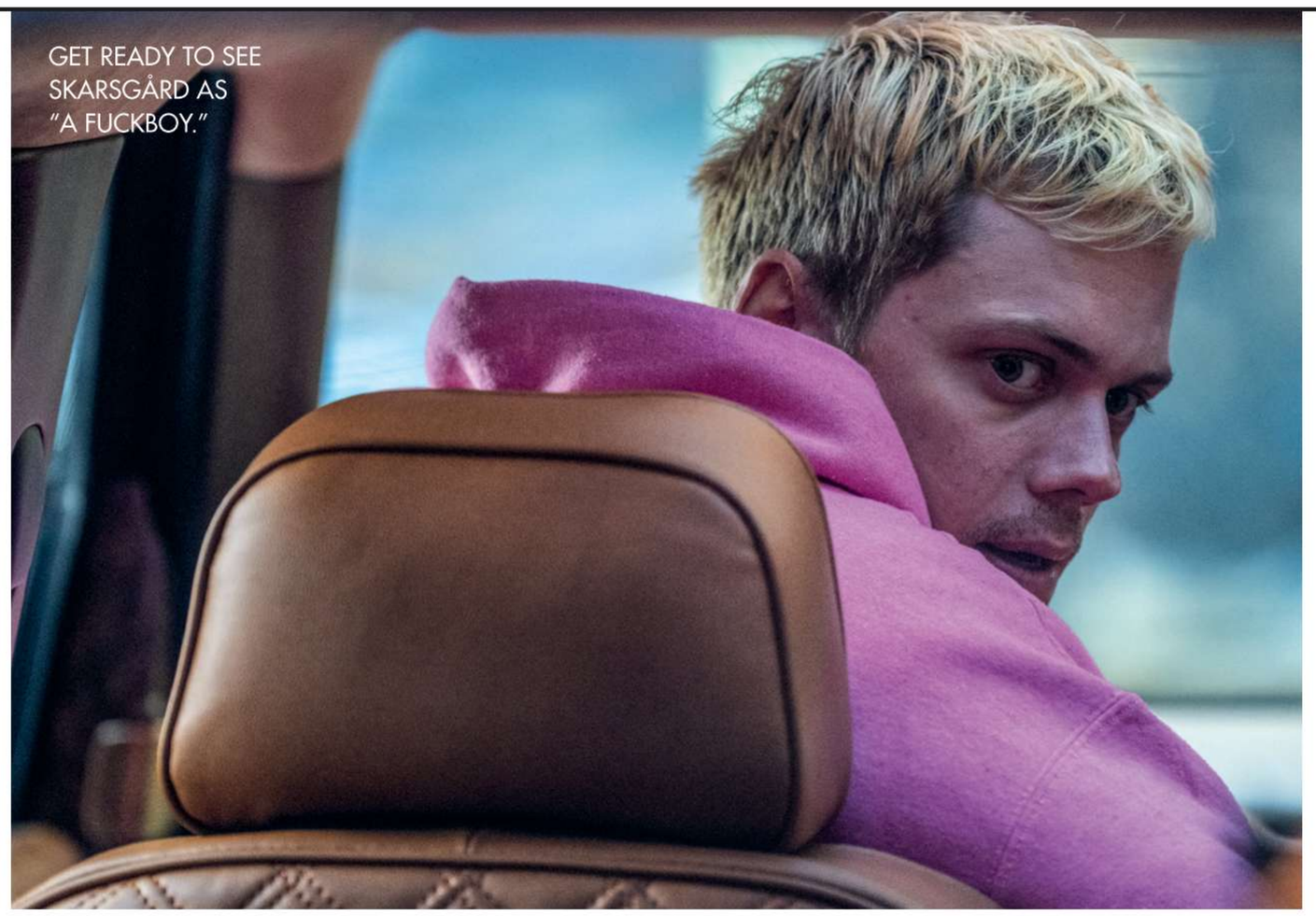
I was really drawn to the idea that some people have so much, and some have so little, and that we all have to live together. The first part of that has been explored a lot in movies, but the fact that *we all have to live together* is the part that really interested me. We shot a lot of this movie in a part of Vancouver that's a combination of condos worth millions, expensive foodie restaurants, designer clothing, and also one of the highest rates

of drug addiction and homelessness in North America. So you have this upperclass population, and the poorest people, living together on the same street. This felt like the perfect backdrop for this story.

Providing the literal backdrop of the story is the behemothic SUV which becomes Eddie's personal arena of pain. The car boasts electrified seats, bulletproof glass, one incredibly temperamental AC unit and plenty more devilish features to orchestrate William's sadistic symphony. How much work went into designing this thing?

I brought on a guy named Grant Armstrong as our production designer. He was an art director on *Gravity*, where they built their sets on rails so they could come apart easily. You could grab a section and slide it out to film in tight spaces. Having that experience made him the perfect guy for this because we wanted to shoot inside a car in ways that had never been done before. He brought on Andy Smith, a legendary guy in this space – he made Nolan's Batmobile and a ton of other incredible cars. I wanted something that felt real. Advanced, luxurious, but also believable. We studied armored cars, the kind they make to transport presidents and kings, the ones designed to withstand rocket fire. And we got obsessed with detail. Something you might not have noticed at the end of the trailer: look at how thick that glass is! If you look carefully, you'll see copper wire stitched into the fabric of the seats so William can tase Eddie whenever he wants. We really tried to think of everything.

The car is also a character in this film. When it gets going, it's a beast. Imagine how heavy that thing is, going 70 miles an hour – it's a wrecking ball on wheels. We wanted it to have beef, to feel threatening. In a way, it's like we made *Phone Booth* set inside *Christine*! We needed this car to be terrifying.



GET READY TO SEE SKARSGÅRD AS "A FUCKBOY."

YAROVESKY SITS AND HAS A GOOD THINK.

Well, when you need terrifying, it helps to have a horror master onboard behind the scenes. I know you and producer Sam Raimi previously worked together on *Nightbooks*. What was his role here?

Sam was so helpful – sometimes with his wealth of experience in practical execution, and sometimes in pure creative ways. We'd geek out together, and I loved it because he was like a kid in a candy store. You'd think he's seen it all, that he wouldn't get excited about this or that, but no – he loved all of it. I showed him how Grant was building the car, and he'd be giddy with excitement about all the cool ways we could use it. We'd talk through VFX shots, and he'd offer his expertise. The great thing about Sam is how much he loves his characters. He would always remind me to make it a personal story. Tell Eddie's story. Make it about [the characters]. If you don't care about them, you won't be scared, you won't be wowed by cool shots, you won't even pay attention. He's a real filmmaker, he's been a great partner, and I hope we make a bunch more movies together.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

PHOTOS (BOTTOM) BY STEVE AGEE • (TOP) COURTESY THE AVENUE ENTERTAINMENT & RAIMI PRODUCTIONS

CO-STARS, CO-DIRECTORS, CO-WRITERS AND CO-PRODUCERS BILLY BRYK (LEFT) AND FINN WOLFHARD (RIGHT).

HELL OF A SUMMER

FINN WOLFHARD AND BILLY BRYK GO RETRO IN NEON'S NEW SUMMER CAMP SLASHER.

By Phil Nobile Jr.

You might not expect an old-school '80s style slasher from two filmmakers who were still in diapers when *Freddy vs. Jason* was released. But full credit must be given to Billy Bryk and Finn Wolfhard, whose debut feature *Hell of a Summer* goes all in on its retro summer camp slasher vibes. The thriller finds Jason (Fred Hechinger), a 24-year-old camp attendee turned counselor, returning to Camp Pineway for yet another year. Upon arriving, he discovers that the camp's owners are missing, and before long this season's counselors (played by D'Pharaoh Woon-A-Tai, Abby Quinn, Pardis Saremi, Julia Lalonde, Daniel Gravelle, Matthew Finlan, Krista Nazaire and Julia Doyle) are being picked off by a masked killer. Give or take an iPhone (or ten), the film could be set in 1981.

"I think that that initial era of slashers was so exciting to us because they have a real grit and charm to them," says Bryk, 25. "We wanted it to have a sort of timeless feel." Wolfhard, 22 (whose nine years on *Stranger Things* has made him a bit of an expert on nostalgic horror), adds, "It was a lot of conversations between our director of photography, Kris Bonnell, going through shots of old horror movies and just seeing the palettes that those filmmakers would use."

Pull any frame from *Hell of a Summer* and you can see the duo have done their homework. The killer does not sport a top-of-the-line mask from an edgy FX studio; it's a cheap devil mask one would find at Party City, giving the film's slasher an energy that recalls *Terror Train* or *The Funhouse*. Similarly, the film's setting is not some prefab backlot or studio build; it's a real lakeside summer camp the filmmakers found at the last minute.

"It was the first summer that camps were reopening after COVID," says Bryk, "so every camp we called said, 'Absolutely not. We've been losing money for two years and this is the first time we can make money.' We could not find a camp for the life of us." At the last minute, social media saved the day. "I found a painting of a camp on somebody's Facebook profile. I thought, 'That's what the movie should look like.' So I tracked down the name of that camp and my dad drove me out. And I called Finn right away and said, 'This is the camp.'"

Bryk and Wolfhard's movie serves up scares and laughs in equal measure, but the comedy is of the earnest, '80s teen comedy variety, a refreshing departure from the winking, meta humor that's been the go-to horror-comedy baseline since *Scream*. "A lot of our writing is just us trying to make each other laugh," says Wolfhard. The pair, who have also worked together on *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* and *When You Finish Saving the World*, focused on crafting an ensemble of Gen Z characters that viewers might not mind seeing catch an axe to the head. Bryk describes the challenge: "You want them to be likable enough that you're wanting to watch the movie, but not too likable that you're heartbroken when they get killed off."

As actor/directors, Bryk and Wolfhard worked to avoid what they saw as an annoying trope. "A lot of actors write themselves as the coolest characters, and we wanted to write ourselves as the most pathetic losers in the script," Bryk says. "It was important to us that we weren't action heroes."

The pair definitely see horror – and further collaborations – in their future, including an update of 1999's *Idle Hands* for Sony. "We have such a shared sensibility," Bryk says. "I think we'll both end up directing films on our own and branching out of horror; that's something that we've been talking about. But it's great that we can also always go back to this partnership."

PHOTO COURTESY OF NEON

Tony Timpone's
ELEGIES

(LEFT TO RIGHT): TONY TIMPONE AND FORMER FANGO SCRIBES TIM FERRANTE AND TOM WEAVER JOIN COLUMNIST DAVID J. SCHOW FOR A SLEEPY HOLLOW FILM FESTIVAL 25TH ANNIVERSARY SCREENING OF *THE CROW* IN 2019.

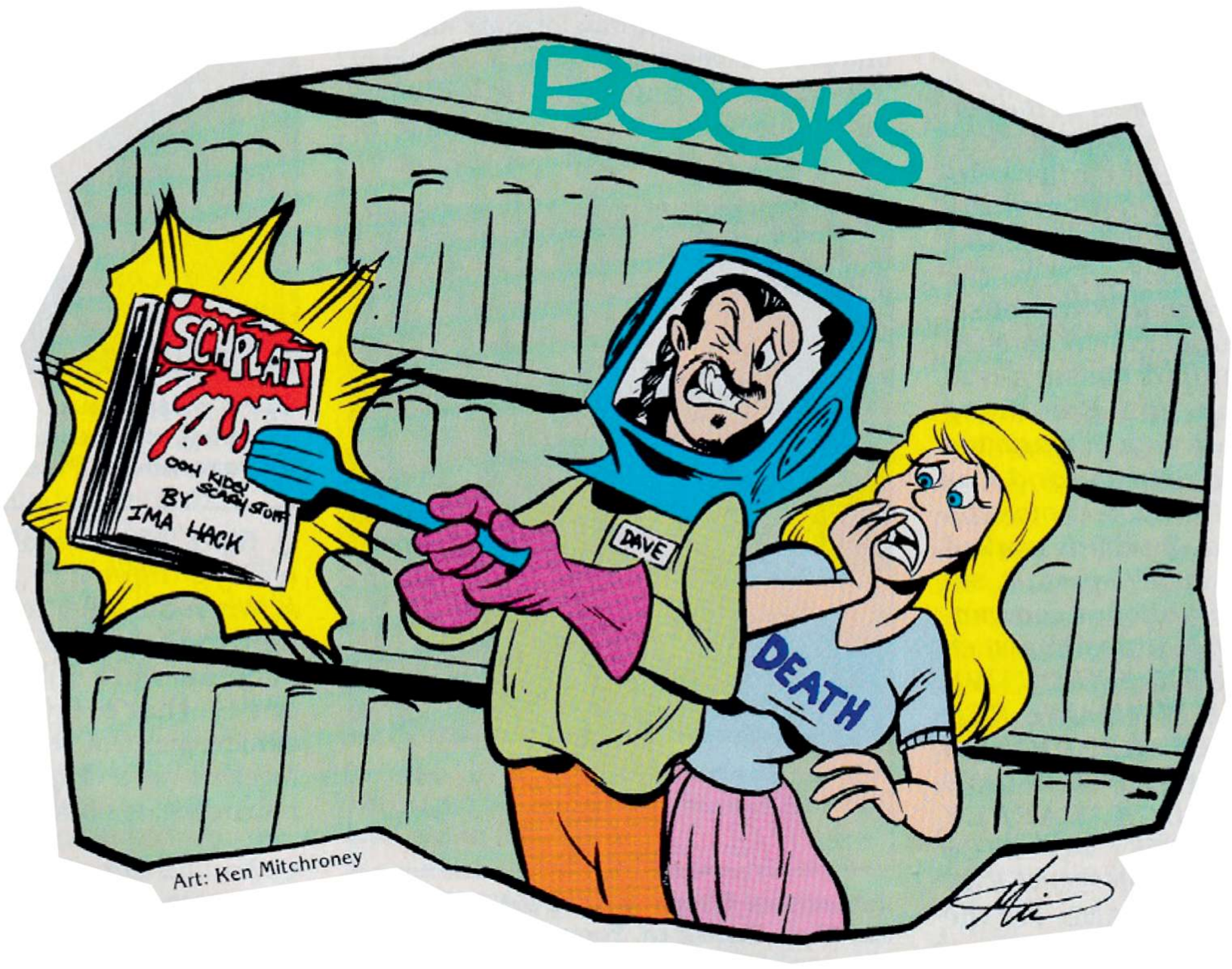
PHOTO BY JACQUELINE FERRANTE © 2025

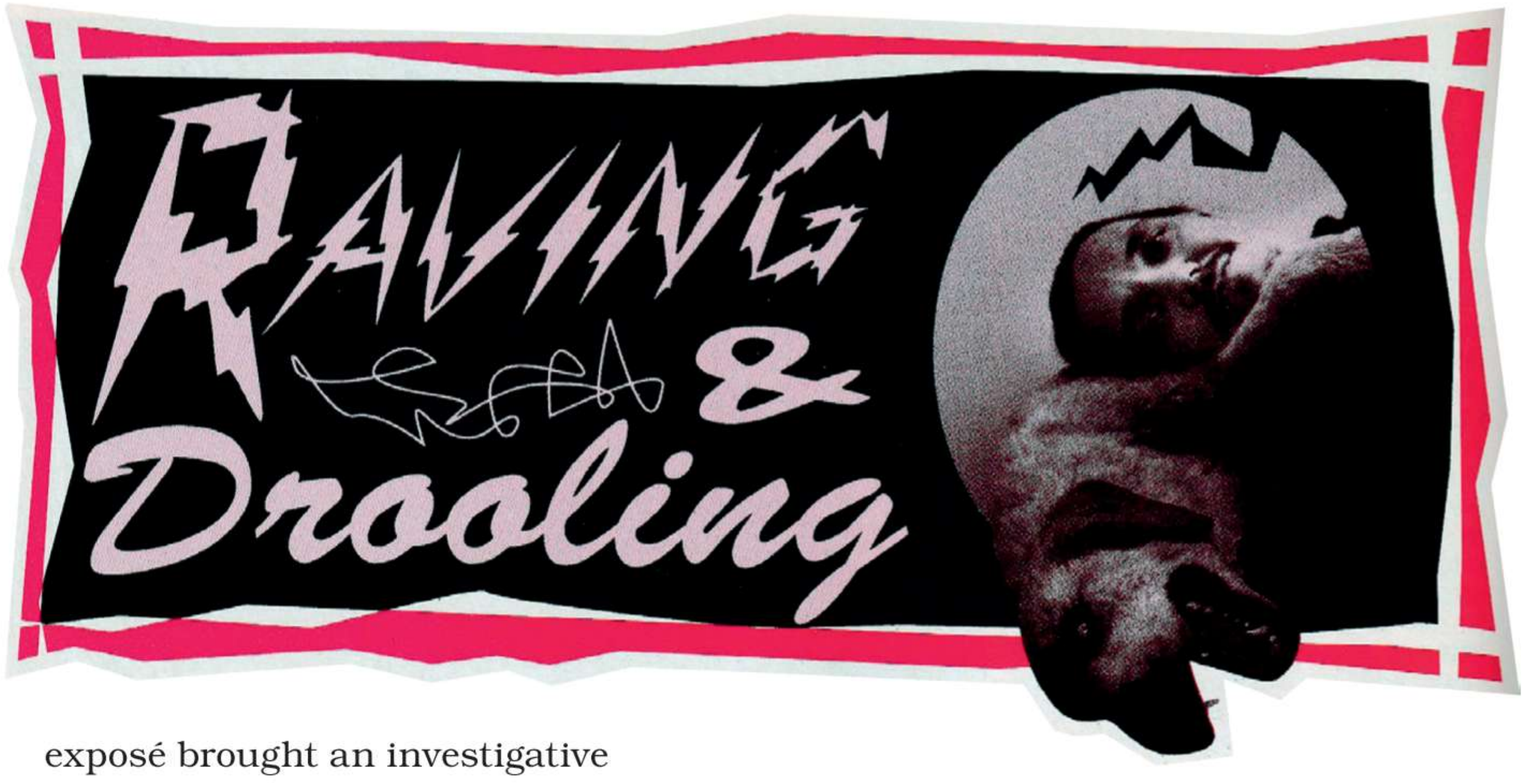
THE SECRET HISTORY OF "RAVING & DROOLING"

HOW SPLATTERPUNK PIONEER DAVID J. SCHOW BECAME A VALUED FANGO CONTRIBUTOR.

"Get me the horror version of Harlan Ellison!" ordered former FANGORIA publisher Norman Jacobs. In the early 1990s, Norm wanted to add a controversial columnist to the Fango writers' bullpen, and I knew just the guy.

Science fiction scribe Ellison wrote the best *Star Trek* ("The City on the Edge of Forever") and *Outer Limits* ("Demon with a Glass Hand") episodes ever. He later penned the "An Edge in My Voice" column for *Future Life* magazine, which Norm and O'Quinn Studios published from 1978-1981. Ellison's heated essays livened up *Future Life*, otherwise the dullest magazine to ever roll off the presses, and I loved reading them.





For the "FANGORIA Ellison" I turned to founding splatterpunk author David J. Schow. Around the time I had taken over as editor in 1987, Fango had been reviewing many of the emerging splatterpunks like Schow, and John Skipp & Craig Spector, in its "Nightmare Library" section. Then-New Yorkers (and frequent Fango office visitors) Skipp & Spector first introduced me to Schow when he was in town from LA. Legend has it that it was Schow himself who coined the term "splatterpunk" at Rhode Island's World Fantasy Convention in 1986. He remained fiercely protective of the moniker, especially when Johnny-come-latelies tried to co-opt the nickname for their own quickie anthologies.

As the splatterpunk movement intensified throughout the late 1980s, New Line Cinema executive Michael DeLuca would scour the pages of FANGORIA searching for future screenwriter leads for his studio's horror franchises. The "3 Ss" (Schow, Skipp & Spector) all took passes at *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child*. (The labored birth of that 1989 movie was chronicled in the pages of FANGORIA #87-88.)

To keep FANGORIA cutting edge, I wanted to enlist the leather-clad trio as contributors to the company's catalog. For sister publication GOREZONE, S&S would tackle the making of Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* (Issue #10) when they traveled to the London set as Clive's guests (and cameoed as monsters). Meanwhile, I asked Schow to keep a diary for FANGORIA when New Line hired him to take on *Leatherface: Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*.

Like *Nightmare 5*, *Leatherface* was a troubled production, but times 10. Lots of studio interference, tough night shoots, undernourished budget… Schow gave it to us straight. His fly-on-the-wall observations pulled no punches. This was not a studio PR "puff piece," which the genre magazines of the day were always being accused of putting out. Other screenwriters and even *Leatherface* cast members slammed Schow for exposing New Line's meat-grinder production mentality. His journal (Fango #88, 11/89) and the aforementioned "Fathering Freddy" exposé brought an investigative journalism dynamic to Fango, something I always aspired to as editor. I wanted some insightful articles to stand apart from the umpteenth makeup FX breakdown.

In 1992, no less than *An American Werewolf in London* director John Landis told the BBC,

"What's interesting about FANGORIA, the level of writing is really quite good and the reportage is really good. But the illustrations are really tacky most of the time."

So, after the creative success (and tons of reader letters) of those Schow-centric articles, and the same year as Landis' quote, I invited Dave to deliver a regular column for us. I wanted not only an award-winning writer to appear regularly in the mag, but someone who could continue to stir up the hornet's nest among Fangorians.

And on that note, Schow's "Raving & Drooling" was born. In his first installment (#112, 5/92), he summed up his genre philosophy and set the stage for what was to come: "Horror at its best *unsettles*. It undermines the world of happily-ever-after."

Each month, I couldn't wait to read what Dave came up with next. As I did often in my editorials, he frequently railed against censors, the MPAA and other so-called moral guardians who targeted the horror films of the day. You kids don't know how good you have it now. In the 1980s and early 1990s, any episode of *The Walking Dead* or *Chucky* could never be broadcast on basic cable, and movies with similar carnage would be branded with X ratings if they tried to get past the MPAA!

Horror fiction was all the rage back then. Publishers Tor, Berkley, NAL and Leisure would bury us with review copies sporting lavishly garish covers every week. One of my favorite "Raving & Drooling" columns (issue #122) exposed the "Horror Book of Clichés," with #8 relatable to both print and celluloid:

"*Conflagrations of Convenience*. That handy dandy flash fire that always seems to flare up in the nick of time to burn down mansions, caves used for sacrifice and bad-guy lairs in general. Sort of like Draino for monsters."

Schow's columns also championed the likes of action-auteur John Woo, Peter Jackson's *Braindead* and profane Brazilian horrormeister Coffin Joe. Nostalgia-wise, you couldn't top his paean to Hollywood Boulevard flea-trap movie theaters. To illustrate those words, Dave brought in cartoonist buddy Kenny Mitchroney. Kenny has since gone on to toil on dozens of major animation properties, including *Toy Story*, *A Bug's Life*, *The Pink Panther* and *Lilo & Stitch*.

David's most heartfelt R&D appeared in Fango #133, where he eulogized his late friend Brandon Lee. Dave had been hired to rewrite Pressman Films' *The Crow*, based on the James O'Barr comic books. While filming in North Carolina, actor Lee was tragically killed in a gun mishap.

Riding the success of *The Crow*, Schow became a sought-after writer for film, TV and literature, so much so that he put "Raving & Drooling" on sabbatical with issue #151 (4/96). He returned for marker issue #250 (2/06), and eventually republished all 41 original Fango columns in his award-winning 2000 collection *Wild Hairs*.

Sad to say, David J. Schow's byline has not appeared in FANGORIA for nearly 20 years. I like to think of DJS as the "Once and Future Columnist." Here's hoping!

Michael Gingold's
Exordium

FORGET NEEDING A BIGGER BOAT, WE'RE GONNA NEED A BOAT IN ONE PIECE.

JAWS: The Bite Goes On

Spending half a century with Spielberg's game-changer.

Has it really been fifty years since *Jaws* was released? I was eight years old when Steven Spielberg's masterpiece first came out, and it wasn't the type of film I typically went to see. I was scared of horror movies as a young kid, and wouldn't embrace them for another few years.

But one thing that did hold a fascination for me at that early age was the world of sharks. Like a lot of kids, I thought the killer fish were seriously cool. They were monsters, of a sort: strange and fearsome creatures that could and sometimes did devour human beings. Occasional trips to aquariums allowed me to feed that fascination.

Sharks were such a ready-made cinematic threat that it's surprising there weren't more scary movies about them before Peter Benchley essentially created an entertainment subgenre with his 1974 novel *Jaws*. I wanted to read it the moment I first heard about it, even though it was a grown-up book of the type I rarely sampled at the time (I was several years away from discovering Stephen King). During a week with the family at an upstate New York campground, however, I spent a rainy day in a paperback-stocked lounge reading Benchley's novel. The shark sequences definitely captured my imagination, though I was nonplussed by all the extraneous stuff that Spielberg and co. wisely deleted in the screen translation, like the Mafia subplot and the affair between Matt Hooper and Ellen Brody. Not to mention questionable lines of dialogue like Martin Brody's "If someone came in here and said he was Superman and could piss the shark away from here, I'd say fine and dandy. I'd even hold his dick for

him." (Can you imagine Roy Scheider saying that one?)

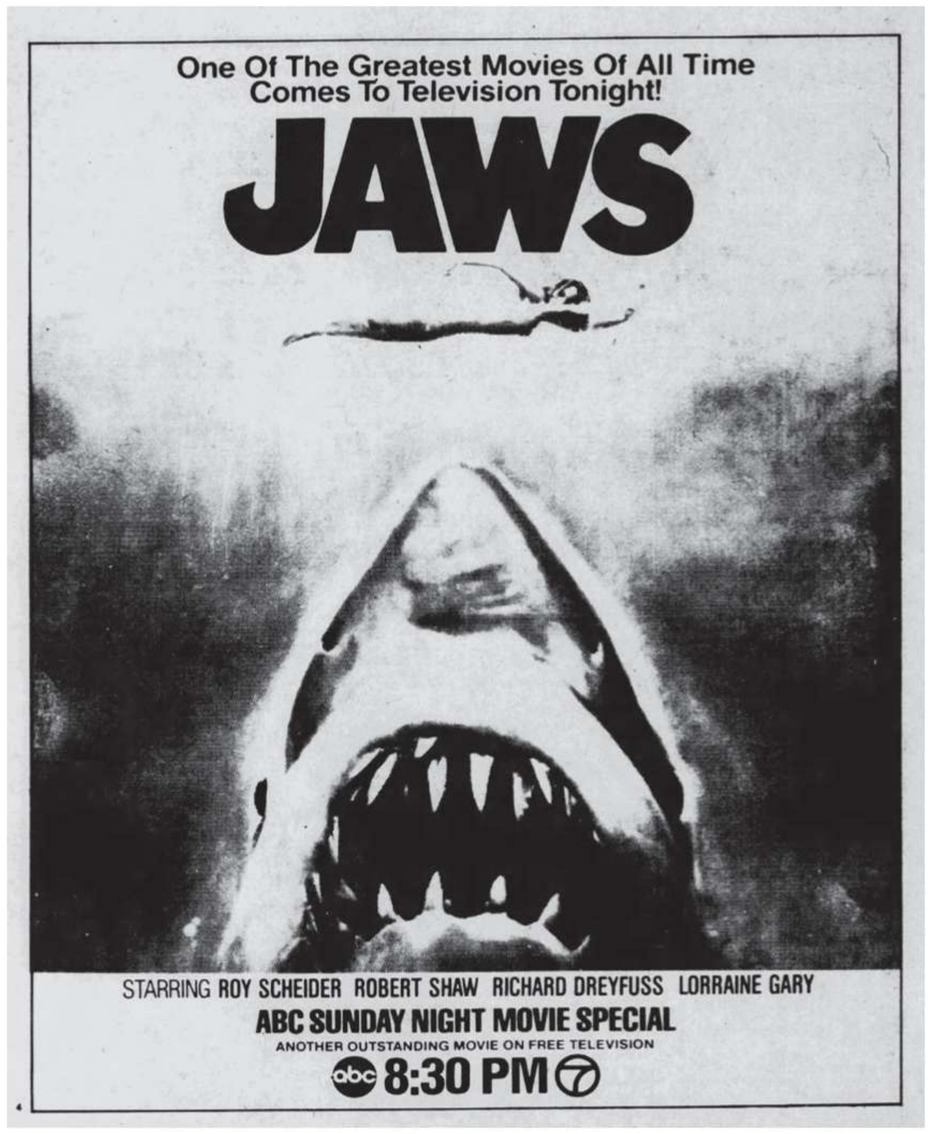
The movie, though? Off limits at first, thanks to the unique tagline appended to the PG rating on the posters and newspaper ads: "May be too intense for younger children." After my dad saw *Jaws*, he opined that I would probably be able to handle it, but we never did head out to see it during its record-breaking first run.

I finally saw *Jaws* at age 12, during its second rerelease in summer 1979, the year I first started seeing serious fright films in theaters. Four years after its first release, *Jaws* had still not aired on broadcast television – its ABC premiere would take place that November – and I was terribly excited as I sat down to watch it at a Saturday-matinee screening. The funny thing was, I wasn't especially frightened by the film on that first viewing. Still a shark-loving kid, I was more eager than apprehensive to get a look at "Bruce," though I did jump with everyone else when he popped up out of the water behind the chumming Brody.

What was clear to me as a budding cineaste was how beautifully made and perfectly acted a film it was. I was held in its grip in the long stretches between shark scenes, and Robert Shaw's *USS Indianapolis* monologue as Quint – even four years after the movie's debut – got applause from the audience. The well-timed humor registered perfectly, too; I recall laughing especially loud at Richard-Dreyfuss-as-Hooper's "Well, if we're looking for a shark, we're not gonna find him on the land."

Jaws made an instant fan out of me – one who, in those days before home video, couldn't wait for that ABC debut to experience it all over again. And even in pan-and-scan, with commercials on a black-and-white set, the film maintained its power. Beyond its suspenseful and visceral impact, it's simply a beautifully crafted production by all hands. The opening moments cruising the ocean floor, the initial credits accompanied by John Williams' classic score, first demonstrated to me that the music could get you nervous before the movie proper even began. (*Halloween* would do the same thing a few months later.)

It's also a model of adaptation and condensation of the source material, a remarkably efficient work of storytelling. And there's the superb power of suggestion Spielberg brought to bear, as much out of necessity (due to the constantly malfunctioning shark mockup) as original intent. To me, the scariest moment is the overhead shot of the fisherman hanging onto his capsized boat in the estuary, as the barely seen great white slides up underneath him and pulls him down. This shot encapsulates the primal fear that *Jaws* preys on: the sense that, as we splash and paddle around on the surface of the ocean or a lake or whatever, there's *something* we can't see lurking underneath us, ready to reach up and drag us down. And yet at the same time, this approach benefits from audience familiarity with *Jaws*' central menace: Everyone knows what a shark looks like, so it's easy for our minds to fill in the blanks when Spielberg shows us little or none of it.


One Of The Greatest Movies Of All Time
Comes To Television Tonight!
JAWS
STARRING ROY SCHEIDER ROBERT SHAW RICHARD DREYFUSS LORRAINE GARY
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Jaws was the second film, after William Friedkin and William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist*, to signal that horror could generate boffo box office, even though there are and were those who would argue that it belongs more in the thriller or adventure category. But the masses went to Spielberg's film for one key reason: to be frightened, to the point that it had people afraid to go in the water for years afterward. (And it did so with a PG, providing a handy rebuke to those who insist "true horror" has to be R or more.) *Jaws* remains a timeless landmark, one of those rare examples where to this day, you can't make a movie on the same subject without this one coming to mind – and boy, have there been a *lot* of shark movies swimming in its wake over the past couple of decades. It was a formative film for me, and it's one of my and my girlfriend's two special movies; the other being *Re-Animator*, which is also celebrating an anniversary this year (see page 14). How singular is *Jaws*? It's one of the few horror classics from the '70s that no one has dared to try to officially remake. Not that I want to give anyone ideas...

QUINT (ROBERT SHAW) FOUGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, BUT BRUCE WON OUT IN THE END.

SceneQueen

RE-ANIMATOR At 40 PART 2

IN HONOR OF ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY, BARBARA SPEAKS WITH THE CAST AND CREW WHO HELPED HER MAKE STUART GORDON'S CULT CLASSIC.

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

Here, Barbara continues her oral history of the making of Re-Animator. *Read Part 1 in Issue 26!*

OUR SCENE QUEEN'S SCREAM SCENE.

Bruce Abbott (Dan Cain) and I auditioned together with a few other Dan and Meg hopefuls. We did scenes together and with Jeffrey Combs, who was cast as Lovecraft's title character Herbert West. Stuart Gordon would give us direction, and then he would tell us to go back out in the hallway and work on it before we performed the scene for him again. I remember thinking how good Jeff was, and wishing for him that he would get the role – not realizing we were reading against him for chemistry, and he had already been cast some days before us!

BRUCE ABBOTT (DAN, LEFT) AND JEFFREY COMBS (HERBERT) HAD GREAT CHEMISTRY TOGETHER AND WITH THE AUTHOR.

Bruce was hesitant at first to audition. "There was a sheer grotesque outrageousness to the script. In fact, I threw it across the room after reading it," he says now. "But my agents convinced me to audition. I had a few people in common with Jeff Combs and he had a good reputation. Gordon's Organic Theater was well-known, too, and so I went – yet still unsure. My first scene to audition was when Dan gets his scholarship revoked. I played it as a guy capsized and rudderless, and Stuart told me it was at that raw moment he knew he wanted to cast me as Dan. No one else had done that. Also, the scene where Meg tells Dan to go away seemed corny to me on paper, but you were the last actress to read with me and you brought a real approach and energy to the scene, a musicality that made it work. I decided to say yes when the part was offered. The chemistry, and the music we made among the three of us, is one of the most gratifying aspects of this film for me."

Jeffrey Combs had very big things to do in his role, and he did so brilliantly. As Meg I, in turn, had some very big things to play off of, but it is Bruce Abbott who, in my opinion, is the unsung hero of *Re-Animator*. He grounds the whole story so beautifully. I had a secret crush on him the whole production, something I only revealed to him a couple of years ago.

I would be remiss to not mention Robert Sampson as my dad, Dean Halsey. Bob was a prolific TV and film actor, and I so enjoyed the depth of reason, truth and warmth he brought to his role before he became a pawn for Dr. Hill's obsessive plans. As Hill, character actor David Gale was a truly kind and sensitive soul. I never felt unsafe in his presence, despite the awful things his character wanted to do to my character. Both Gale and Sampson are gone now, but every time I watch the film, I recall how fond I was of those two seasoned pros, professional and courteous thespians who threw themselves into this outlandish movie and helped us newbies navigate the production.

Once we were all officially cast, we rehearsed in my living room for three weeks. Turns out, I had the biggest space! That is much more rehearsal time than is typical on a film production. Stuart took a more theater-oriented approach, as if we were getting ready to do a play, which isn't surprising when you consider his experience as the director of a theater company. I think that time working on the material is one of the many reasons *Re-Animator* was so successful. We knew our stuff: our lines, our beats. We were all very secure in our approach.

Stuart liked big choices and big emotions. He wanted us to play to the back of the house, and the movie still feels very operatic and grand to me today. Stuart always had a note for his actors. He was a very hands-on director, especially in the rehearsal stage.

Jeff illuminates, "Stuart had a vision and he wanted the scene played his way. More often than not, he was right. But sometimes a different approach would be brought up by one of us and, though initially met with resistance, often a better choice would come out of those lively discussions." Indeed, many problems were solved during that rehearsal period – so we were more than ready on day one of filming. Read on to discover how the production unfolded in the next issue!

The final part of Barbara's oral history of RE-ANIMATOR concludes in Issue 28!

Stephen Graham Jones'

SLASHER NATION

AND ~~JUSTICE~~ FOR ALL

GET READY TO
DIG TWO GRAVES,
SLASHERS.

Slashers are spirits of vengeance. They're all about balancing the scales of justice. When the world's out of balance and the only thing that can set it right again is many, many pounds of flesh, then an eye in a moldering mask will open, a rotted hand will thrust up from a grave, a relic or artifact will get triggered, and it's on. Let the bloodletting begin. Jason's not stopping until every last camper who cut his mom's head off is slaughtered, Freddy's punishing the parents of Elm Street as long as his face is still showing the burn scars from the mob justice that was visited on him, and Ghostface… well, Billy may not believe in motives, but he's for sure got one, doesn't he? As does Jigsaw. As do the one-offs like Marty from *Slaughter High*, Cropsy from *The Burning*, Kenny riding that *Terror Train*, Candyman haunting Cabrini-Green like it's his own Haddonfield, and on and on down the video-rental shelf to *Thanksgiving*, say, where the wrong being righted is the death of a loved one. Or go back to Leatherface from the year before, when *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (2022) left the cannibal killing floor, went full slasher: like Jason, the world killed that big lovable guy's mom. So, now, he's going to kill the world. As much of it as he can reach with that family saw, anyway.

Is this vengeance, though, or something else?

"Justice" is where we want to land, as slashers are justice fantasies – justice seems to be what these wronged slashers are after, as it's what's been denied them. Justice, however, is supposed to be "fair and reasonable," and usually involves some sort of due process, fair trial, all that good stuff meant to keep innocent people from this society's version of the guillotine. In the slasher, though, just being *adjacent* to the guilty parties is enough for some casual eviscerating, never mind that Jason and Freddy and the rest are judge, jury, and very prejudiced executioner. They hear no appeals, are all about slamming that gavel down into face after face, and the only recesses they take are between installments.

If not exactly justice, though, then what is it slashers are after?

"Revenge" is the easy and usual and completely sufficient answer here, but there are a couple other terms that float around it that are worth teasing apart so we can apply them as needed: retribution, retaliation.

At its most basic level, to get revenge is to inflict harm on someone for a wrong they've committed, be it physical, emotional, social, whatever. Key to revenge is the idea of hitting back *harder* – this is keenly personal, after all. These disproportionate responses are fun to cheer for, as of course people should move through the world with more compassion, so hurting those who have acted without compassion can be a deterrent to others, and hopefully get them to comport themselves better. Jason Voorhees is probably the holotype here, the type specimen, the one who most clearly embodies this brand of slashing, but, fun as he is to watch do his bad business, are all the bodies he leaves behind finally a deterrent, or do vanloads of campers just keep showing up at Crystal Lake?

Jason's work is never done, no.

Perhaps a different tactic could make the world better.

Enter… Jigsaw.

Jigsaw in the *Saw* franchise is less about revenge, more about retaliation, at least when we understand that,

FREDDY, LEATHERFACE, JIGSAW: EACH HAS HIS OWN UNIQUE APPROACH TO REVENGE.

in the military sense, retaliation is about "returning an attack." As in, here I was just kicked back on the porch reading a good book when someone threw a hornet nest into my lap, so of course I chased them down the street to return those stings in some fashion, perhaps cobbling together my own complicated "stinging" machine to process that person through, probably with excruciating slowness. As brutal as this retaliation can get, though, keep in mind that the person suffering the retaliation has, to the person dispensing the "justice," been asking for it – thus the form of this punishment. Key to retaliation is that form, as that's where the *poetic* justice of it all is: they've done it to themselves, haven't they? Thus the bespoke contraptions, the Rube Goldberg fun.

And then there's retribution. On the surface, retribution seems situated exactly between revenge and retaliation: "punishment for a wrong or criminal act," giving someone what they "deserve." However, with revenge, there's that distinct desire to see the wrongdoer suffer, and suffer a lot, while with retaliation, the form of that suffering is closely related to the wrongdoer.

Retribution is a slightly different flavor, though. Yes, we all know about what dish is best served cold, but, really, retribution is a bit colder, in that it's not as personal. And, while retaliation is also about balancing those scales, serving back what was never asked for in the first place, retribution gets its "justice" in a manner that doesn't exactly grant personhood to the victims, as if they shed that status the moment they stepped over the line into their wrongdoing.

Victor Crowley of the *Hatchet* series is probably who we all think of for this, as he's just eliminating trespassers, might as well be an electric fence jacked up to 11, or a honey badger on a long leash, a less refined Candyman in a housing project made of swamp, but there's a spectrum of these-type slashers. At the other end from Victor Crowley is, say, Ann from *Happy Birthday to Me*, with her very Roland-from-*Scream IV*-"reasons." Note how none of her victims are even really "people" to her. Rather, twisted as she is, they're just cogs in her grand revenge machinations – *Nothing personal, y'all, I just needed your lives to, you know, do a thing*. Same with Lillian from *Edge of the Axe*, except the reason killing her victims is nothing that personal to her is that… she's not really herself when she's doing it. These people are just in the way, in that they can out her, so: got to erase them.

C'est la vie – or, rather, its opposite. And, the "wrongdoing" they did wasn't even wrong at all. It was just a case of wrong time, wrong facility.

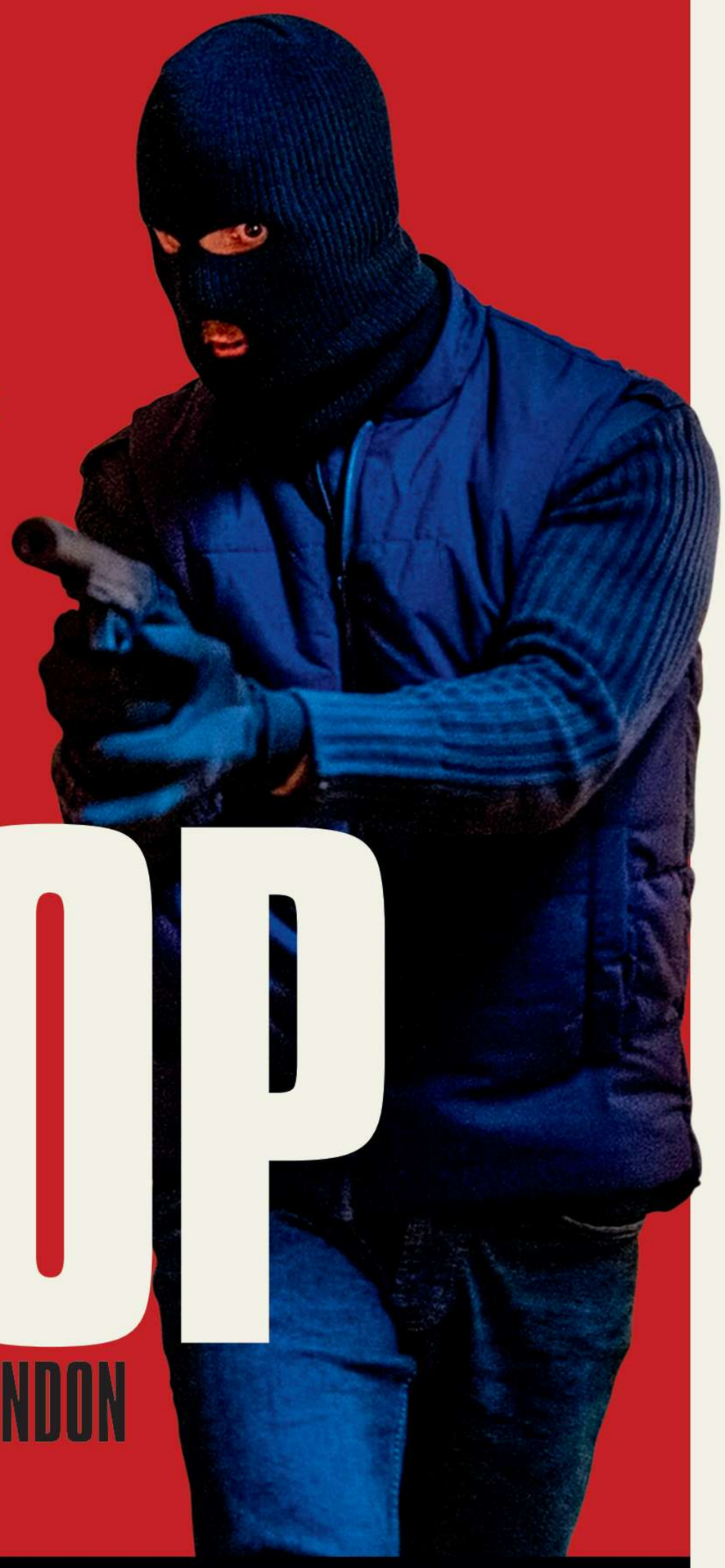
So, yes, all slashers can huddle under the "Revenge" umbrella, and that's completely sufficient to explain them and what they do. If you're seating them at a slasher wedding, though, then you're probably going to want to arrange them together by type, to foster better conversation/glaring at the tables. In which case, "Retaliation" and "Retribution" might come in handy. Sure, there's still gonna be blood on this *Prom Night* dance floor by the end of the night, but at least, now, Jigsaw doesn't have to try to explain his methods to a Jason, who, let's be honest, thinks a lot more directly about these matters. 💀

‘YOUR ATTACKER HAS SENT YOU A NEW MESSAGE’

DISCUSSING DROP

WITH CHRISTOPHER LANDON

BY BJ COLANGELO



THE DIRECTOR OF *FREAKY* AND *HAPPY DEATH DAY* DROPS US INTO HIS REAL-TIME THRILLER.

THIS PAGE AND NEXT: *THE WHITE LOTUS* SEASON 2’S MEGHANN FAHY STARS AS VIOLET, A SINGLE MOM ON THE WORST FIRST DATE EVER.

When horror fans hear the name “Christopher Landon,” the first titles that come to mind are assumably his heartfelt horror comedies like the *Happy Death Day* films, *Freaky*, *Scouts Guide to the Zombie Apocalypse*, *We Have a Ghost*, and his recent contribution as one of the screenwriters behind *Heart Eyes*. Readers of this magazine most certainly love to point out that Landon was also a major creative force throughout the *Paranormal Activity* franchise, and real cult cinema heads could probably pull the trivia fact that his first major project was co-penning the screenplay for Larry Clark’s *Another Day in Paradise* with Stephen Chin.

This is to say, it’s understandable if horror fans caught the trailer for *Drop* – Landon’s exhilarating latest directorial effort about a widow on her first date since her husband’s passing finding herself stalked and harassed through anonymous drop messages to her phone – and thought this sort of Hitchcockian thriller was a departure from his usual fun horror fare.

“It’s funny because I always say it’s kind of a return in some ways, because what feels like a million years ago, I wrote *Disturbia*, which was very much a modern *Rear Window*-esque thriller,” Landon tells me. “I keep calling this my ‘grown-up movie,’ because I make movies that I think are so heightened, silly, and fun, and a lot of them are focused on teenagers, so this was an opportunity to flex a different muscle but also still stay true to what I love to do.”

Drop came at the perfect time for Landon, who had stepped away from “a dream job” when he exited *Scream 7*, a film that would have brought his career full circle. “Some people don’t know this, but one of the reasons why I was so excited to do *Scream 7* was because I was an intern at the company that made the original *Scream*,” he explains. “I was the first person to read that spec script when it came in. I told my boss to buy it. So I had this deep personal connection to that.”

Landon had met the incomparable Wes Craven and was fortunate enough to be on set for the first *Scream* movie,

DIRECTOR CHRISTOPHER LANDON SHOWS 'EM HOW IT'S DONE. L-R: STUNT ACTOR AOIFE BYRNE, LANDON, VIOLETT BEANE, STUNT ACTOR FIONN CONDREN, AND STUNT COORDINATOR BRENDAN CONDREN.

so walking away from *Scream 7* was, as he rightfully expresses, "heartbreaking." But then he came across Jillian Jacobs and Chris Roach's screenplay for *Drop* and realized he could still pay homage to Craven, albeit in a very different way. Instead of honoring him through the slasher genre, *Drop* could be Landon's *Red Eye*.

"It was just a weird, kismet-y thing where I was like, 'No, I didn't get to make that other thing, but I still got to tell Wes I love him in a different way,' and that was really meaningful and powerful to me." Fueled by his love of Craven, Hitchcock, and chamber piece thrillers of the 1990s, *Drop* is the modern alchemy of a style of film that went out of favor for some time but is coming back with a vengeance. Almost the entirety of *Drop* takes place in a massive, gorgeous restaurant setting the creative team designed specifically for the film. Surrounded by windows, glamorous production design, and presented as dozens of stories high above the ground, *Drop* feels dangerous the moment that Meghann Fahy's Violet arrives for her date – as if a place this hell-bent on being seen as the perfect date night spot is fostering a deeply sinister energy.

At its core, *Drop* is a movie about two people sitting at a dinner table and staring at their phones for most of the run time, a concern Landon was eager to overcome and manage to make exciting. "Everything that seemed like

a daunting challenge turned into a really thrilling opportunity because I got to throw out a bunch of rule books and just do it my way," he tells me. "And that was a shit-ton of fun." It certainly helps that the film is carried by Brandon Sklenar and Meghann Fahy, two captivating performers who draw audiences into the world and keep them entranced under their spell. Fahy is the focus of every scene, and *Drop* is yet another bit of evidence that she's one of the most compelling actors currently working.

Landon first saw Fahy the way much of the world did, with her mesmerizing performance on season 2 of *The White Lotus*. "The funny parallel is that she sits at a lot of tables in *The White Lotus*, and I couldn't take my eyes off of her," Landon explains. "That's what I was really looking for: someone that had a certain kind of magnetism, a certain kind of relatability, and a likeability that Meghann just has." There was no doubt in his mind that she was the one for the job. "You want to fall in love with your lead a little bit, and I immediately did." Between *Drop* and last year's *Your Monster*, the Primetime Emmy Award-nominated performer may be new to horror, but she's taking no prisoners.

Violet is an incredibly demanding role and one that calls for a lot of things Landon had not yet seen in her career repertoire, so there was a huge amount of trust required for him to offer her the role. "But I just remember at the end of my first day of shooting, I was like, 'There's nothing she can't do,' and I've never felt such immense confidence moving forward on something," he tells me. "No matter what, I have this person in my corner who's going to absolutely just destroy this, and she did." *Drop* only works if the audience is on board with Violet's quest to figure out who is threatening her from her phone, but given the distressing commonality of the experience, this is a horror story that will resonate and speak to countless viewers.

Being harassed online is a lot like being locked in a room after a bomb has gone off. If you're inside the walls, you're living an absolute fucking nightmare, but no one outside the door is any wiser to the carnage from within. Sadly, Landon is not immune to the overwhelming, inescapable, and grievous feeling of being tormented by people who "live in your phone," and he channeled his real-life experiences facing online harassment into the project.

"I think it's also just a deeply relatable feeling and concept," Landon says. "I just think that everyone at some point or another has experienced some kind of harassment and abuse by people they don't know, and people who don't know them, and unfortunately, we live in a time and a culture where we have a certain kind of technology that allows for this dark anonymity. And so the movie plays on that in the most extreme possible way."

Extreme is putting it lightly. Similarly to the psychological nail-biter *Compliance*, and the *Black Mirror* episode "Shut Up and Dance," *Drop* shows a character being not just stalked, but ordered to do things at the behest of an unseen assailant, including murder.

But Violet is a fighter, and not one to let someone bully her into submission. She is, as Landon describes, "a character who doesn't allow that to destroy her." She's forced into a situation she never asked to be a part of and instead of being consumed by it, "it fires her up and I think that is something personal to root for as well," Landon says.

It may not be a slasher, but *Drop* is still giving horror fans a final girl-esque protagonist to obsess over… and a reminder to us all to turn off discoverability on our phones. 💀

PHOTOS BY BERNARD WALSH, COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES

DAVID CRONENBERG PULLS BACK THE SHROUDS

BY PHIL NOBILE JR.

THE LEGENDARY DIRECTOR TAKES HIS RECURRING THEMES OF SEXUALITY, BIOLOGY AND TECHNOLOGY INTO THE GRAVE — AND YOU'RE INVITED.

A few years ago, you'd have been forgiven for thinking that David Cronenberg was finished making movies. After 2014's *Maps to the Stars*, there was an eight-year gap in which fans feared they'd watched his last feature. Thankfully, 2022's *Crimes of the Future* triumphantly brought the filmmaker back to screens, and with his new film, Cronenberg reveals that not even death itself can stop his exploration of his (and our) relationship with the flesh.

In *The Shrouds*, an entrepreneur named Karsh (Vincent Cassel) creates a controversial new technology that provides the bereaved with a live feed of their loved one's decomposing body. On the eve of expanding this tech into a global franchise, an act of grave desecration sends Karsh down a path of secrets, conspiracies, and espionage.

The Shrouds finds Cronenberg expanding on his lifelong themes of technology and biology, fused this time with an autobiographical echo: Cronenberg's wife succumbed to cancer in 2017, and Karsh's reckoning with the havoc caused by his late wife's disease not only provides the film's emotional core, but is partly drawn from Cronenberg's experience.

FANGORIA was honored to speak with Cronenberg about ghosts, grief, social media, and the subgenre (you know the one) to which he gave bloody birth fifty years ago.

KARSH'S (VINCENT CASSEL) KILLER APP (FACING PAGE) MAY HAVE REVOLUTIONIZED GRIEVING, BUT IT DOESN'T KEEP THE NIGHTMARES AWAY.

As a member of a fairly exclusive club (Filmmakers Who've Adapted William S. Burroughs Novels), I was curious what you thought of last year's *Queer*.

Yes, Luca [Guadagnino]'s film. I liked it a lot. There's a speech that [Daniel Craig's] William Lee gives that's the exact same speech that my William Lee gives in *Naked Lunch*, which is legitimate because in both cases we were using Burroughs' book *Queer* as part of our source. There are other elements of that book in my *Naked Lunch* as well, but it's all up for grabs, really. I think *Queer* and *Naked Lunch* would make a good double bill, actually.

Early announcements about *The Shrouds* said it was about a man 'who builds a device to connect with the dead,' and that gave me pause, because although your films are often about transcendence, your work has always been so grounded in atheism. So I spent a few anxious months wondering what a David Cronenberg ghost story would look like.

Well, it was very strange when I read that. And in fact, when Philip K. Dick's trustees read that, they thought that I had maybe taken that from his novel *Ubik*, in which there is the idea that the brain still can function even after death. And so I had to assure them by sending them the script that that wasn't at all what I was dealing with in the movie.

One lazy assumption in the trades and you're hearing from legal departments.

Well, I had met Philip Dick's two daughters long ago when, in fact, I was thinking of doing an adaptation of *Ubik*, so it was very legitimate for them to make that connection. So it was all very cordial and friendly, but under

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other circumstances, yeah, it could have been a lawsuit or something.

The Shrouds opens with Karsh getting some unsolicited grief therapy from a dentist, of all people. That's very unexpected, but also felt very authentic. When someone we love dies, everyone wants to help, or wants to *feel* like they're helping, and you get advice from some strange places.

Strangely enough, I remember after I'd made my first film, *Shivers*, I had a dentist named Dr. Oiffer. Don't ask me why I remember this, but I asked him if he would be interested in seeing my movie, and he said, 'Why would I go see a horror film when I have so much horror in my own life?' [*laughs*] And this is coming from a guy who's just about to drill my teeth. So I thought, 'Okay, he has a point.' I guess he wanted to see very light comedies if he was going to see anything.

The dentist in your movie is very kind and humane; maybe Dr. Oiffer rubbed off.

I don't think Dr. Oiffer is directly connected with my dentist here, but it is an interesting dentist movie moment for me.

I'm curious about Karsh's attitude when he reveals the Shroud technology to his blind date. Is there a casual cruelty to it? He doesn't prepare her for the fact that she's about to see a live feed of his wife's dead body. He's almost rubbing her face in it, which again felt very authentic to the way some folks mourn; it's almost confrontational. They crave a witness to their pain.

I think you're quite right about that. There's also the fact that, in distancing himself from his grief and trying to make a technological event out of it, he has also distanced himself from really sussing out other people's reactions to that grief. And so he's disconnected himself from a very delicate perception of this proposed date. And he barely notices when she signs off and walks away.

Karsh says being able to see his wife's body in the grave 'drains away the fluid of grief that was drowning him.' Do you think it would work? If this tech existed, would you buy in?

I totally would. And in fact, it could happen. Maybe it would be a system of cameras, rather than a shroud itself that is a camera. But the technology to do this is definitely there. If anybody wants to do it, I'm willing to sell franchises.

And you think that folks would get comfort out of this kind of technology?

I have no idea, honestly. But I can't be that unique. I'm not arrogant enough to think that I am, and therefore, I think there would be some who would want to do that.

And certainly in the Middle Ages, where death and skeletons and burial and graveyards were much closer to people, it might've been quite a bestseller, I think. It had partly to do with medieval Catholicism, where the dance of death was a big deal. People were advised to consider themselves mortal with the promise of an afterlife,

KARSH'S WIFE BECCA (DIANE KRUGER) COMES TO HIM IN A HAUNTING SERIES OF DREAM SEQUENCES.

> "I DIDN'T WANT TO DO THE TRADITIONAL GRIEF FLASHBACKS... I WANTED TO FOCUS ON WHAT KARSH WAS FOCUSING ON, WHICH WAS HIS WIFE'S DISEASE, HER GRADUAL DISMEMBERMENT AND MUTILATION, AND THE WEIRD SEXUALITY INVOLVED IN IT."
>
> – DAVID CRONENBERG

AS HIS AI ASSISTANT HUNNY (ALSO DIANE KRUGER) LOOKS ON, KARSH TRIES HIS EPONYMOUS INVENTION ON FOR SIZE.

but at the same time, they had an engagement with the real life of death – that is to say burial, disintegration and so on. So maybe in another time it would've been a better-suited technology, I don't know.

Side note on corpses: was that your silicone cadaver from *Slasher* and your daughter Caitlin's short film *The Death of David Cronenberg* I saw being exhumed in the background of the vandalism cleanup scene?

I confess that it was.

You're getting some mileage out of that thing.

My crew were begging me to do it, and also it just saved us some money, so. I didn't do a close-up or anything like that, but yes, that is the same corpse. A multi-use corpse.

I was really taken with the thread of dream sequences in the film, in which Karsh's deceased wife Becca (Diane Kruger) appears to him in various stages of her cancer.

That's the only time we see Becca, and I didn't want to do the traditional grief flashbacks of the time they were at the beach together, or when they met and it was all so wonderful and so on. I wanted to focus on what he was focusing on, which was her disease, her gradual dismemberment and mutilation, and the weird sexuality involved in it, or anti-sexuality involved in it. So that was my way of delivering some moments from the past without doing, as I say, a realistic flashback. I didn't think that would work in this movie.

Something you really nailed is that dreams about our dead loved ones, and I say this as an atheist, become these almost sacred experiences. They're anxious visitations that you nevertheless look forward to.

Certainly I've had dreams like that about my wife, so I know what you mean, completely. And I was just meaning to replicate that. It's him reliving moments with his wife – obviously not in a realistic frame, but close enough to have serious emotional resonance for him.

The film has this unblinking frankness about navigating sexuality within one's grief. Movies tend to present grief as this monastic state, but here Karsh is so honest about how much of his grief is about losing the connection he had with Becca's body. And he tries to maintain that connection past her death in different ways, including a sexual, posthumous jealousy.

Well, I think it's all realistic, and it's all things that I have felt. And I also drew from stories that I had heard, about post-death discovery of betrayal. There were some people living near me, and I don't want to get into the specifics of it, but basically after the husband's death, the wife discovered that he had had a mistress for many years. And she felt that that overturned her entire memory and life, and suddenly it was betrayal instead of love, and all after death. I can't say it's a common occurrence, but it's not that unique either.

A throughline in your work is the way society reacts to a certain fork in the road, whether that's a biological mutation or a new invention. Here that felt closer to home than usual, with a concern about how this new app is going to create issues about privacy and even national security.

Well, TikTok for graveyards.

Right. I think in the last six months, these issues have been very much on the minds of people. You have zero social media presence, so how aware are you of what that world is like?

I'm not on any social media, but I know to some extent what it entails just because everybody talks about it all the time; you can't avoid Instagram even if you're not on Instagram. And of course there's been a lot of writing about the damage that it might be doing, or conversely how it really is fulfilling its

“THE TECHNOLOGY TO DO THIS IS DEFINITELY THERE. IF ANYBODY WANTS TO DO IT, I’M WILLING TO SELL FRANCHISES.”

- DAVID CRONENBERG

IS CRONENBERG LINING UP A SHOT, OR LOOKING AT TIKTOK FOR RESEARCH? WHO CAN SAY?

KARSH SHOWS TERRY (DIANE KRUGER ONCE MORE) GRAVETECH'S FLAGSHIP CEMETERY.

promise of connecting people in an intimate, personal way, and how that could go wrong, how it can go right.

The other moment that made me think of social media was that Karsh has two or three opportunities in the film to see Becca's body 'IRL,' as the kids say, after the vandalism happens. And he declines every time. He wants to keep her on a screen, and that also felt very... contemporary.

Yes. And I think that shows you the schizophrenic, paradoxical, conflicting feelings that he has. He'd rather keep her at that distance and see her on a screen than to actually be in the box with her, which in a way would happen if he dug her up and opened up the box. I think he's afraid of the reality of it and doesn't want to disturb the setup that he's getting comfortable with.

Back in the '80s or '90s, there was some article that mentioned that your protagonists tend to look like movie star versions of you. And at the time I thought, 'That's kind of a reach. I don't think Jeff Goldblum looks like David Cronenberg.'

No. People have said that I look like Viggo Mortensen, as well, and of course I only wish.

But here, Vincent Cassel could almost be your stunt double. Was that a conscious thing for this story?

If you look at our face shape and our eyes and everything, we don't really look anything alike. But you have to understand, he knew that he was playing me. That was his approach to the character. And so it's not just his hair, but it's the way he moves, the way he speaks. And he said he was really modeling himself after me in terms of movement, in terms of voice and so on. It's an actor's choice that he made.

What was your reaction to that choice?

I said, 'That's fine.' With all my work, it starts out with some memories and actual events in my life, but as soon as you start writing the script, it becomes fiction and the characters are fictional. And of course with Karsh, I am not a tech entrepreneur and I don't own a cemetery and I don't own a restaurant. I wouldn't be good at that. So he is different from me. It's a *melange*, it's a centaur, it's a combination creature. And whatever makes an actor feel that they have a real handle on the character, as long as it doesn't take them into some strange, wrong place, I'm happy with.

Your name gets flung around these days as an adjective on a lot of movies where maybe it isn't warranted. 'Cronenbergian,' 'body horror.' And I was curious how you felt about that part of your legacy.

Yeah. I think in terms of *The Substance*, it's legitimate, but to me it's all fine. Steal from the best, what can I say? [*laughs*] But no, being an influence on Coralie Fargeat, and also Julia Ducournau [*Raw*, *Titane*] has said that I've been an influence on her filmmaking... they're my cinema daughters. I think it's great. But I still don't know what 'body horror' means.

There was a minute a while back where I think we had all thought you'd quietly retired from filmmaking. It's so exciting to be getting new David Cronenberg movies in 2025.

Well, I'll try to keep it going as long as I can. 💀

This conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

KARSH AND MAURY (GUY PEARCE) SURVEY THE GRAVESITE VANDALISM THAT SETS THE FILM IN MOTION.

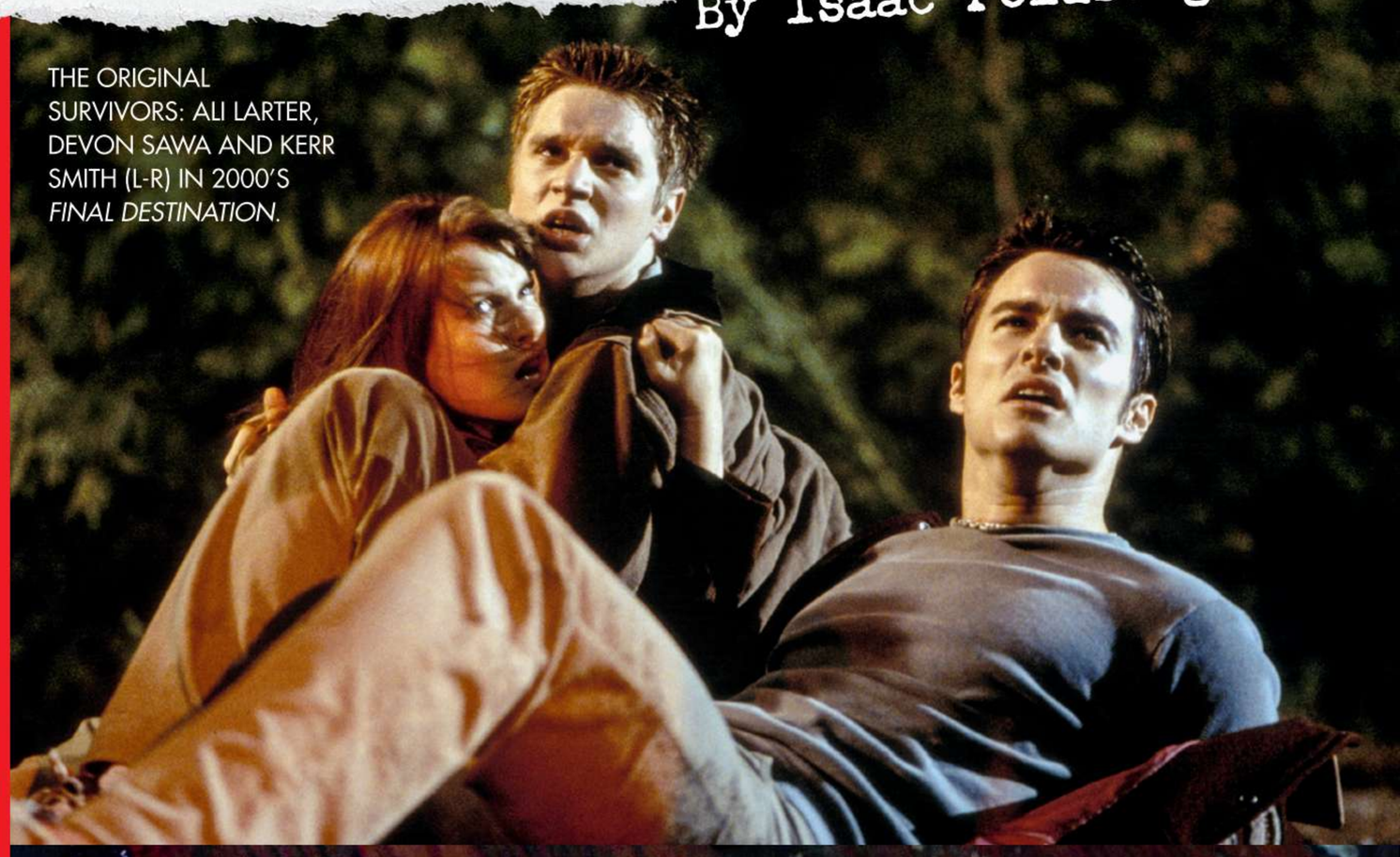
IN DEATH, THERE ARE NO ACCIDENTS, NO COINCIDENCES, NO MISHAPS AND NO MISTAKES

25 YEARS OF FIGHTING DEATH IN THE FINAL DESTINATION FRANCHISE.

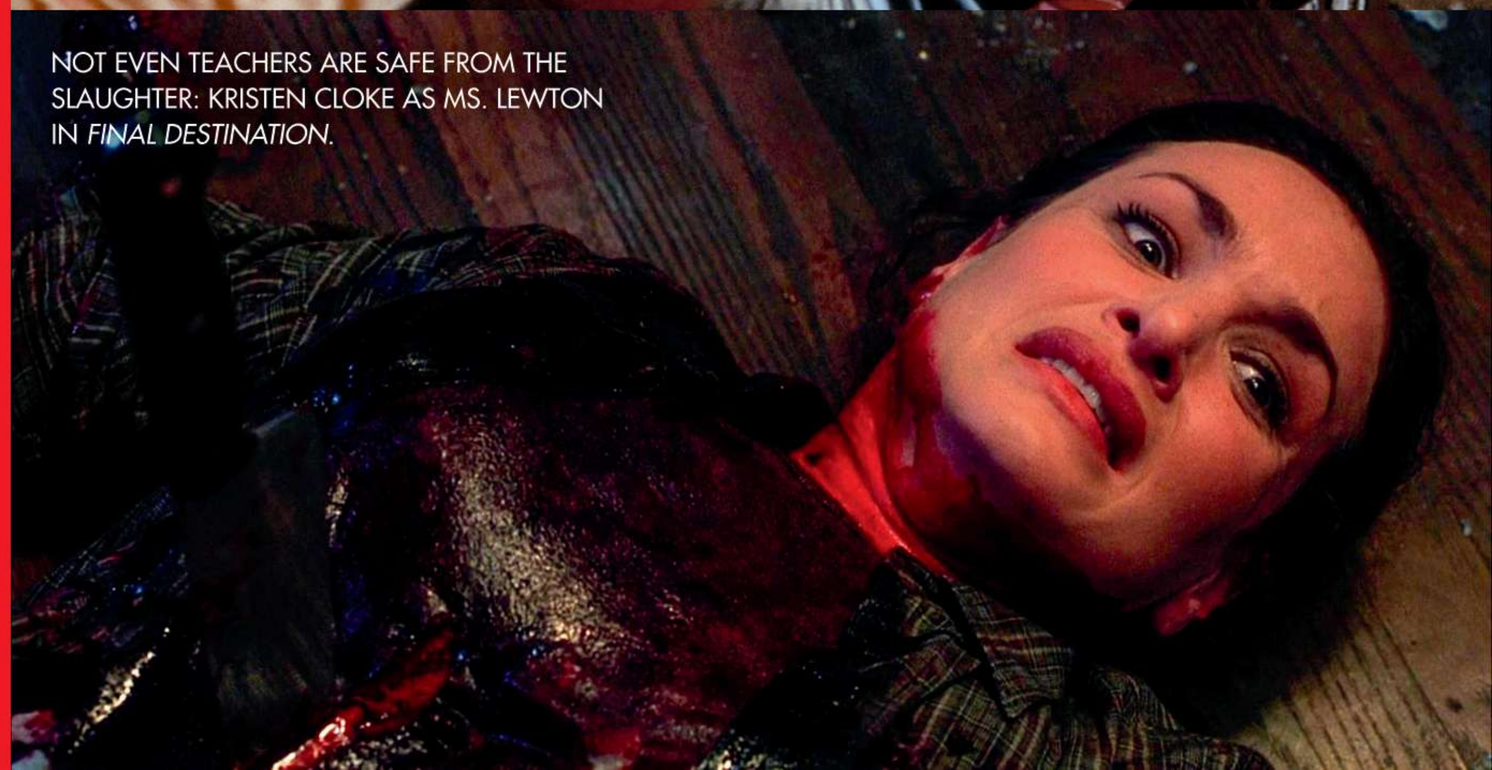
By Isaac Feldberg

Barbed wire vivisections. Roller coaster rampages. Gymnastics practice. The logging truck incident. Only one horror franchise has mastered the dark art of the everyday death trap, unleashing devastation with unerring spatial logic and a sadistic sense of humor.

Final Destination first hit theaters 25 years ago, launching one of the most surprisingly resilient horror franchises this side of *Scream*. In the diabolical simplicity of its premise – characters survive a catastrophic accident, only for Death to strike them down in the order they'd been scheduled to die – and the cruel spectacle of its what-if executions, this turn-of-the-century touchstone harnessed the existential fears of a fatalistic generation. Arriving ahead of 9/11, *Final Destination* weaponized a soon-to-be-omniscient anxiety of impending disaster. Across all five entries (with a sixth, *Bloodlines*, out May 16), the franchise has offered queasy catharsis to audiences all too accustomed to anticipating worst-case scenarios from daily routines.



THE ORIGINAL SURVIVORS: ALI LARTER, DEVON SAWA AND KERR SMITH (L-R) IN 2000'S *FINAL DESTINATION*.



NOT EVEN TEACHERS ARE SAFE FROM THE SLAUGHTER: KRISTEN CLOKE AS MS. LEWTON IN *FINAL DESTINATION*.

"It's an existential question that this shockingly popular entertainment is asking its audience to consider," explains Craig Perry, the only producer to have been involved with all six films. "How do you respond to the inevitability of death? What do you do as a person in the face of that? Do you cower, go to a corner, and wait for it to happen? Do you ignore it, go live your life: whatever happens, happens? Do you try to outrun it? These films force you to contemplate: What does death mean to me – and, more importantly, what does life mean?"

Like the film itself, the story of *Final Destination* starts with an ominous in-flight experience. On a plane home to Kentucky, series creator Jeffrey Reddick read a story about a woman who switched her flight at the prompting of her superstitious mother; the flight she'd originally booked then crashed. "She'd cheated death," he remembers thinking. "But what if she was supposed to die on that flight?"

Conceived as a script submission to *The X-Files*, Reddick's "Flight 180" gave Scully's brother the premonition that led him and others to disembark. Reddick, who was working at New Line at the time, never submitted the story; friends advised him to turn it into a feature treatment, which New Line later purchased. Perry and producer Warren Zide were brought on by studio founder Robert Shaye to develop it into a script.

"The characters were going to be adults; when *Scream* came out, they told me to make them teenagers," Reddick recalls. New Line also wanted Death visually represented, so "it became this angel of death. His M.O. was playing on their survivors' guilt, messing with their minds until they died by suicide."

X-Files veterans James Wong and Glen Morgan were hired to rework the treatment, introducing *Final Destination*'s calling card in their concept of Death's design playing out one circuitous fatality at a time. "I don't think the franchise would have taken off like it did without that," says Reddick. "It rooted it more in reality." Wong was hired to direct; he and Morgan co-wrote the script, with Reddick also receiving screenplay credit.

For Wong, the film's "primal fear" was not only death's inevitability but its presence in everyday life. As crash survivors Alex (Devon Sawa), Clear (Ali Larter), and Carter (Kerr Smith) eluded Death's design while their friends perish one by one, "we had the idea Death was all around us but not something you could see: that, through Rube Goldberg machinations, Death could kill you with anything at any time," he explains. "We all have this fear of life being preordained, of fate awaiting us. You're not usually faced with a guy in a mask trying to kill you with a knife, but you're often faced with your bathtub."

This opened the door for the franchise to prioritize practical effects, which Wong calls "one of the most important decisions we made."

ALEX (SAWA), I DON'T THINK THAT'S GONNA HELP.

> "THESE FILMS FORCE YOU TO CONTEMPLATE: WHAT DOES DEATH MEAN TO ME - AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHAT DOES LIFE MEAN?" - CRAIG PERRY

"Glen and Jim were adamant about keeping things practical, as much as possible, to make it so people couldn't distance themselves from the action taking place," Perry notes. "That one astute decision led to endless headaches; it's logistically challenging to make sure you can practically pull it off, but that's also what fed my love for the franchise. The special effects department loves it, too; they're tasked with engineering the most creative sequences with human ingenuity."

CLEAR (LARTER) WATCHES DEATH DO HIS THING.

KEEGAN CONNOR TRACY (KAT) IN THE *FINAL DESTINATION 2* SCENE THAT RUINED LOGGING TRUCKS FOR ALL OF US.

BUT SHE COULD HAVE IT WORSE – SHE COULD DIE LIKE DENNIS (DAVID KOECHNER) IN *FINAL DESTINATION 5*.

In the scene where Alex and Clear meet at a cafe, fellow survivor Terry (Amanda Detmer) is killed by a speeding bus. Two lifecasts of Detmer, torsos filled with over two gallons of fake blood in Ziploc bags, were created. Wong recalls the moment of impact as a triumph of editorial wizardry. After editor James Coblentz noticed the production was using a flat-nosed bus, he aligned a "tiny, fuzzy wipe effect" so the front of the bus would push it across the scene, meaning Detmer could keep moving until one frame before the collision. "Holy shit," Wong remembers thinking. "It was just perfectly timed."

The original ending featured Clear and Alex having sex, Clear discovering she's pregnant, and Alex sacrificing himself to save her and their unborn child. "That ending was more philosophical: there's no way to escape death, except with new life," Morgan explains. "The test screening didn't go so well." After all the mayhem, it felt too soft. Shaye approached them the next day with a pivotal note: "I want another bus hit to end the movie."

Thus, Morgan recalls, a franchise was born: "The audience told us what they wanted. It wasn't *Barry Lyndon*; it was my first film, and that's ultimately what it was: dark, sadistic, fun. You're watching it, saying, 'I hope this character doesn't get it, but I can't wait until they do.' Going forward, the philosophy could be left to one-sentence questions by the great Tony Todd: 'There are no accidents. I'll see you soon.' That was enough for audiences, getting a burger afterward and talking about the fun of Seann William Scott's head getting cut off, to get around to asking: '*Are* there accidents?'"

Final Destination became a word-of-mouth hit, opening at $10 million but grossing five times that in U.S. theaters, which Perry attributes to "the originality of the concept and the audacity of the execution." At one screening, Wong recounts, ushers stood off to the side, "waiting to see the audience reaction to the bus hit, because they knew people would flip out. I was proud it was such a visceral moment."

New Line moved ahead with *Final Destination 2* in 2003, though Wong and Morgan were unavailable. "You don't name a movie *Final Destination* thinking there'll be a sequel," Perry admits. "Once we were in that lane, we started to imagine what we could do to expand the world."

Driving home to Kentucky weeks later, Reddick found himself behind a log truck – and pulled over to give Perry a call. The studio bought his story and merged it with one by co-writers Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber, who wrote the screenplay. The idea, says Perry, was "to preserve tone while ramping things up," summoning new survivors – led by A.J. Cook – to decipher Death's design while impaling, decapitating, and incinerating them with gorier abandon.

The late David R. Ellis, a stunt-savvy second-unit director, was hired to direct. "His understanding of how to capture mayhem was, at that point,

BECAUSE SKIN CANCER WASN'T ENOUGH OF A DETERRENT, *FINAL DESTINATION 3* ENDED THE TANNING BED CRAZE FOR GOOD.

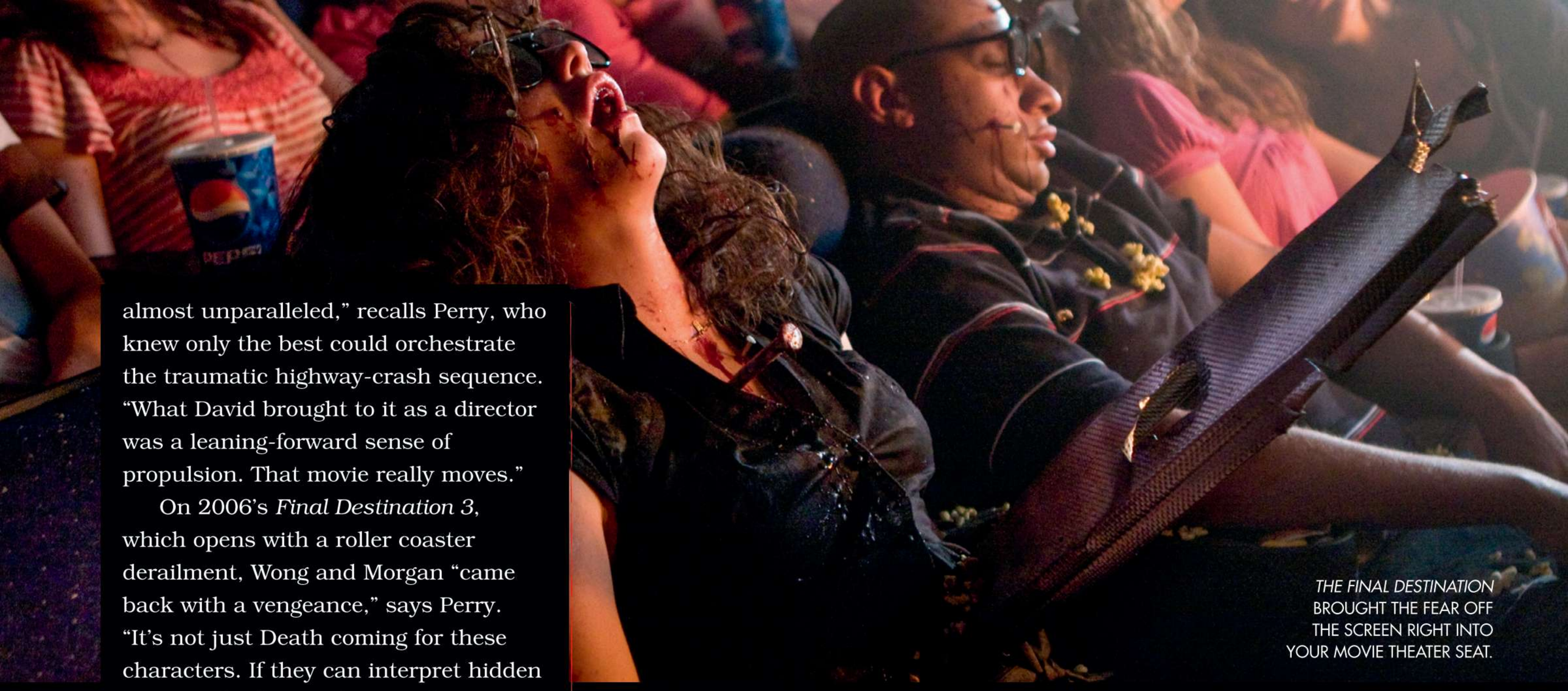
almost unparalleled," recalls Perry, who knew only the best could orchestrate the traumatic highway-crash sequence. "What David brought to it as a director was a leaning-forward sense of propulsion. That movie really moves."

On 2006's *Final Destination 3*, which opens with a roller coaster derailment, Wong and Morgan "came back with a vengeance," says Perry. "It's not just Death coming for these characters. If they can interpret hidden signs in the frame, they can figure out how to stop it. That procedural element changed our trajectory, giving characters more agency going forward."

Wong was enticed back by the challenge of the opening, for which the young cast – led by Mary Elizabeth Winstead – was dangled upside down; he's as nostalgic for the salon sequence, in which two friends are jointly incinerated in malfunctioning tanning beds. "That was such a cringeworthy sequence," he recalls. "Most people experiencing Death's hand don't have the added vulnerability of being naked. It was one of those deaths that took you to a place you can imagine and don't ever want to be." Comedy, horror, a twisted punchline: that scene "fulfilled in a very compact way everything we were trying to achieve with those two movies," Wong says.

Morgan concocted it as an homage to *Psycho* after actress Kristen Cloke, who played Ms. Lewton in *Final Destination*, urged him to visit a tanning salon. "As soon as the lid closed, I understood," he recalls. "I ran home and wrote that in 20 minutes." Morgan also spent three days in a Home Depot, mapping out the path of a runaway forklift that sends sharpened stakes and plywood flying before causing one character to fall against a nail gun.

Ellis returned to direct 2009's *The Final Destination*, a lesser-loved installment filmed in high-definition 3D with the camera system developed for *Avatar*. "It was the first time those cameras had ever been outside, let alone strapped to a car," recalls Perry. "All of that film was a gamble." Filmed in New Orleans post-Katrina, it was additionally impacted by the 2007-2008 Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike, per Perry: "We couldn't make changes to the script. There was a lot going on that made that a particularly challenging production."



THE FINAL DESTINATION BROUGHT THE FEAR OFF THE SCREEN RIGHT INTO YOUR MOVIE THEATER SEAT.

Still, boosted by 3D ticket sales, it became the franchise's top-grossing entry, paving the way for 2011's *Final Destination 5*, directed by Steven Quale (who did second-unit on *Avatar* and "was robotic in his machine logic, making sure every angle was exact," per Perry), to course-correct. "Outside of strategic moments coming at you in 3D, we wanted scenarios where the audience was asked to come inside, capitalizing on layers of depth," Perry recalls of sequences like the suspension-bridge collapse and a spine-snapping scene involving a gymnast Candice (Ellen Wroe) performing on parallel bars.

"Candice's scene synthesizes what makes *Final Destination* great," Perry says. "It's an enormity of information, working in concert to allow heinously disturbing death imagery to unfold: suspense, anticipation, and subtlety together… With these movies, you could strip out dialogue and still understand what's happening. It's always been pure cinema, pure visual storytelling."

With a sixth entry out soon, Reddick's struck by how faithful the franchise has remained to what inspired him: "You can't cheat death, but you can prolong your life." *Final Destination*'s longevity, he notes, reflects this. Nobody could've expected the franchise to endure as it has; Wong and Morgan say its influence has been their proudest legacy. "That means the world to me. As a horror fan, I believe in paying it forward," says Morgan. "Life is short," offers Wong. "*Final Destination* is profound in that sense; it allows you to think about your mortality." 💀

OF ALL THE WINCE-WORTHY DEATHS IN THIS FRANCHISE, CANDICE (ELLEN WROE) IN *FINAL DESTINATION 5* MIGHT TAKE THE GOLD.

BY ISAAC FELDBERG

WHEN DEATH CHEATS DEATH:

FINAL DESTINATION IS BACK

WITH BLOODLINES, THE BELOVED FRANCHISE RETURNS AFTER A FOURTEEN-YEAR HIATUS.

Man dies in tractor accident
Obituary
Pickpocket Killed by Piano-Moving Truck
Unsung Hero: WWII Veteran Succumbs to Heart Attack
Local Musician Takes Fatal Plunge Off Balcony
Unforeseen Tragedy Claims Life
Grocery store robbery leads one dead
Man Dies After Art Statue Mishap
Man crushed by cable car in wire accident

BUILDING A SERIAL KILLER INVESTIGATION WALL FOR *DEATH*? THAT MIGHT TAKE A WHILE.

In searching for the right filmmakers to bring *Final Destination Bloodlines* to life, New Line executives and producers suspected they'd found the right fit in directing duo Zach Lipovsky and Adam Stein. Then, during one final Zoom pitch meeting, all hell broke loose.

As the duo wrapped up their presentation, a fireplace roaring behind them spread to the mantel. Panicking, Stein grabbed a fire extinguisher as Lipovsky switched on an overhead ceiling fan, extinguishing the flames. Crisis averted, they sat back down – only for everyone to hear a loud, cracking sound as the ceiling fan broke off and plummeted into frame, decapitating Stein.

"It was the cherry on top," recalls producer Craig Perry. By this point, it had become clear to those in attendance that they were witnessing an elaborate, exceedingly well-staged prank involving pre-recorded footage and visual effects. "It demonstrated not only their understanding of tone but also that they had the production know-how to make this movie happen," Perry says. "Now, that took balls the size of channel markers to do, because if it didn't go well, the whole thing's lost, but I appreciated the effort, hubris, and confidence they put into making it happen."

As the filmmakers tell it, the "high-risk, high-reward gambit" came about after Lipovsky realized they could use a video file for their virtual background and sync it to a separate sound recording. "There were many computers involved, and we both had to click the buttons at the exact same moment to trigger the sequence of events that would happen," he says. Though nerve-wracking, the idea was too ridiculous for either

KAITLYN SANTA JUANA LEADS THE NEW CAST AS STEFANIE.

"WE'VE MADE IT OUR MISSION TO DESTROY MANY PROFESSIONS OVER THE COURSE OF THIS FRANCHISE: THE AIRLINE INDUSTRY, ACUPUNCTURE, LASIK..."

- Craig Perry -

PHOTOS BY ERIC MILNER, COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. PICTURES, INC.

to resist, adds Stein: "We'd have been stupid not to try it."

Final Destination Bloodlines (out May 16) reflects this same sadistic sense of play. Following a college student (Kaitlyn Santa Juana) who heads home upon experiencing nightmares of a disaster that happened decades earlier, only to realize these dreams could hold the key to preventing her own family's grisly demise, the film is the franchise's first in fourteen years – and finds its lust for bloodily consequential chain reactions undiminished.

"We've made it our mission to destroy many professions over the course of this franchise: the airline industry, acupuncture, LASIK," says Perry. *Bloodlines* adds tattoo parlors, waste disposal services, MRI scans, and more to the hit list, but that formula of keeping every kill grounded in relatable scenarios remains intact. The co-directors even broke down all the franchise's previous death sequences to measure their moving parts. From sudden shocks to agonizing near-escapes, "there are many ways to die in *Final Destination*, but some are more successful than others," says Lipovsky.

Calibrating how many misdirects, reversals, and puzzle pieces to include in each sequence, they tried to stay one step ahead of the audience. "As one character is walking backwards into the street, everyone's reaching out to stop it, because they know the bus is about to hit him – but then the bus misses him," explains Stein. "That 'bad news, good news' switch helps to engage the audience, as it engaged us in the previous films."

Lipovsky and Stein first came together as contestants on Fox's short-lived competition series *On the Lot*, a brainchild of Steven Spielberg and Mark Burnett that challenged hopeful filmmakers to produce short films each week, with one earning

TONY TODD RETURNS TO THE FRANCHISE AS BLUDWORTH IN HIS FINAL SCREEN ROLE.

(L-R) TEO BRIONES, ANDREW TINPO LEE, KAITLYN SANTA JUANA, APRIL AMBER TELEK, ALEX ZAHARA, RICHARD HARMON, ANNA LORE, AND OWEN PATRICK JOYNER ATTENDING WHAT WILL, PRESUMABLY, NOT BE THEIR LAST FUNERAL.

IN *FINAL DESTINATION BLOODLINES*, WE SEE DEATH TYING UP LOOSE ENDS FROM DECADES AGO, WITH A 1960S DISASTER SOMEHOW ESCAPING HIS ATTENTION… UNTIL NOW.

a $1-million development deal at DreamWorks. Neither won, but the duo – paired up as roommates by a casting director – collaborated in early audition rounds. "From the beginning, we shared a sensibility," says Stein. "Philosophically, we connected, and we shared an excitement to brainstorm and build on each other's ideas."

Growing up in Vancouver, where most of the franchise's previous films were shot, Lipovsky recalls *Final Destination* looming large over his budding interest in visual effects: "Lots of my friends died in *Final Destination* or were involved in *Final Destination* as crew members." The concept of engineering Rube Goldberg machines on screen delighted him, and Lipovsky leapt at the chance to execute one during *On the Lot*; his short *Danger Zone* depicted one mistake leading to another around a science laboratory in a single 360-degree shot.

It's safe to say that Lipovsky and Stein have outdone themselves in this respect; *Bloodlines* triggers chain reactions more elaborately unhinged than any seen in the previous films. "All filmmakers gravitate toward *Final Destination*, because the villain is the filmmaking," says Stein. "It's death by insert shot; the filmmaking craft itself is what creates the suspense."

After *Final Destination 5*, producers originally considered setting a sequel in the world of first responders. That EMTs, firefighters, and police face life-or-death situations in the line of duty "gave us the freedom to be creative with a variety of scenarios," recalls Perry, but "it became a question of strategy, economics, and coming up with the right ending that honored and serviced those characters in that milieu" while delivering the bravura opening and ending sequences *Final Destination* is known for. "We never quite cracked the code," he says.

Enter Jon Watts (*Cop Car*), whose pitch resuscitated the film's development; later adapted into a screenplay by Lori Evans Taylor and Guy Busick, his approach exhumed a family's history, introducing new ideas that invigorated the producers. "We got excited about exploring what kind of a long tail Death's design might have," says Perry. The concept that Death might still be in the process of tidying up loose ends that had escaped its reach for decades led the production back to the late 1960s, for an opening scene at a towering tourist attraction called the SkyView that ranks high among the series' most ambitious.

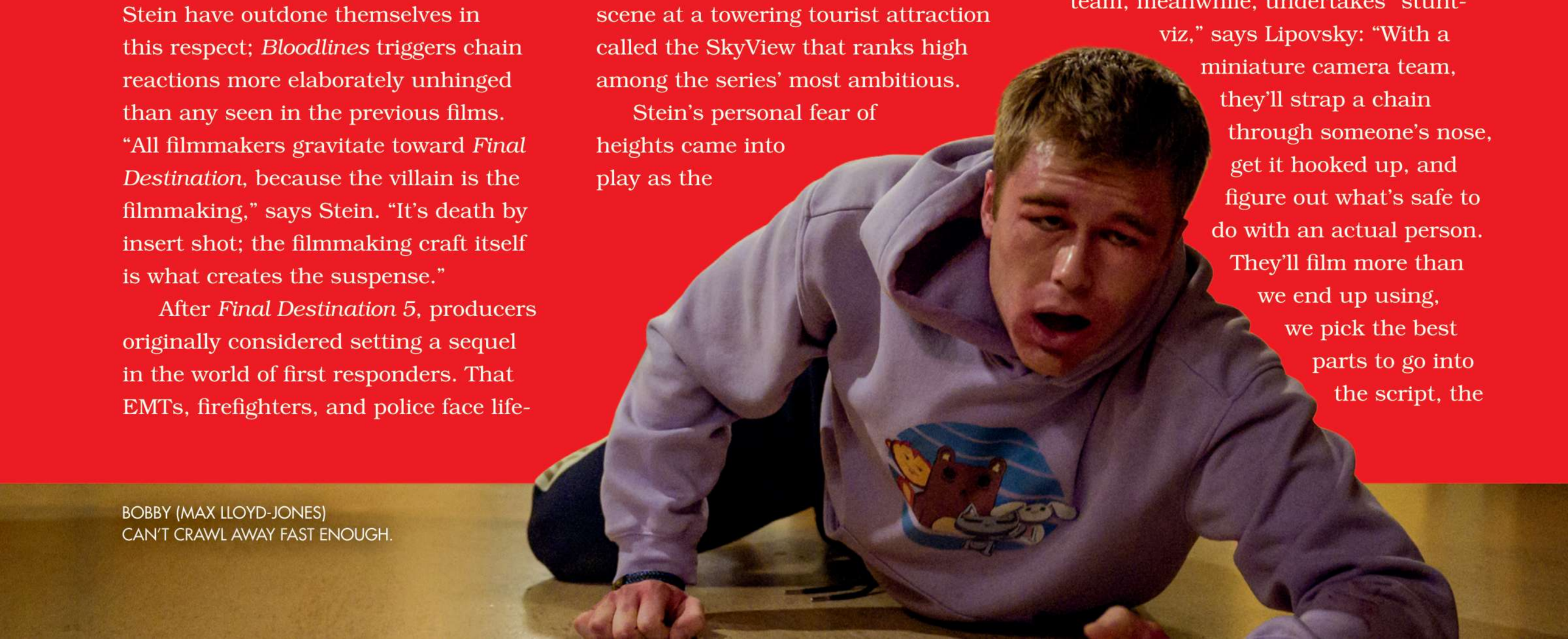
Stein's personal fear of heights came into play as the team weighed ideas; after Lipovsky paid a visit to Toronto's CN Tower and returned with all manner of disorienting details – from the point at which a camera's tilt would induce vertical perspective to steel beams that would start to blur as a glass elevator accelerates upward – figuring out how to exploit Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* effect to their own ends became a shared imperative.

Lipovsky, meanwhile, faced his fears during a sequence involving a rear-loading garbage truck; with their hydraulic arms and compacting sections, he's always found the vehicles unnerving. Working on *Bloodlines* from his Vancouver apartment, Lipovsky caught himself looking down through the eighth floor into an alleyway where trucks lifted and flipped dumpsters each day.

"Staring down into the truck itself, I was seeing garbage dumped in and the walls closing in, for years," he recalls. "As we were looking for what to ruin, we realized we could ruin a suburban street: people walking dogs, somebody trimming a hedge, kids kicking a soccer ball, a garbage truck coming around the corner."

Years of animation, storyboarding, and scouting went into creating every major sequence in *Bloodlines*. "It's never just writers and directors; it's all department heads," says Lipovsky. "It's the props team saying, 'This object is in a restaurant; what if it went through someone's eyeball?' It's the stunt team asking, 'What if this lit on fire?'"

"You're changing it every day, for years, watching CG pre-visualizations with the crew to test what's working and what's not," adds Stein. The stunt team, meanwhile, undertakes "stunt-viz," says Lipovsky: "With a miniature camera team, they'll strap a chain through someone's nose, get it hooked up, and figure out what's safe to do with an actual person. They'll film more than we end up using, we pick the best parts to go into the script, the



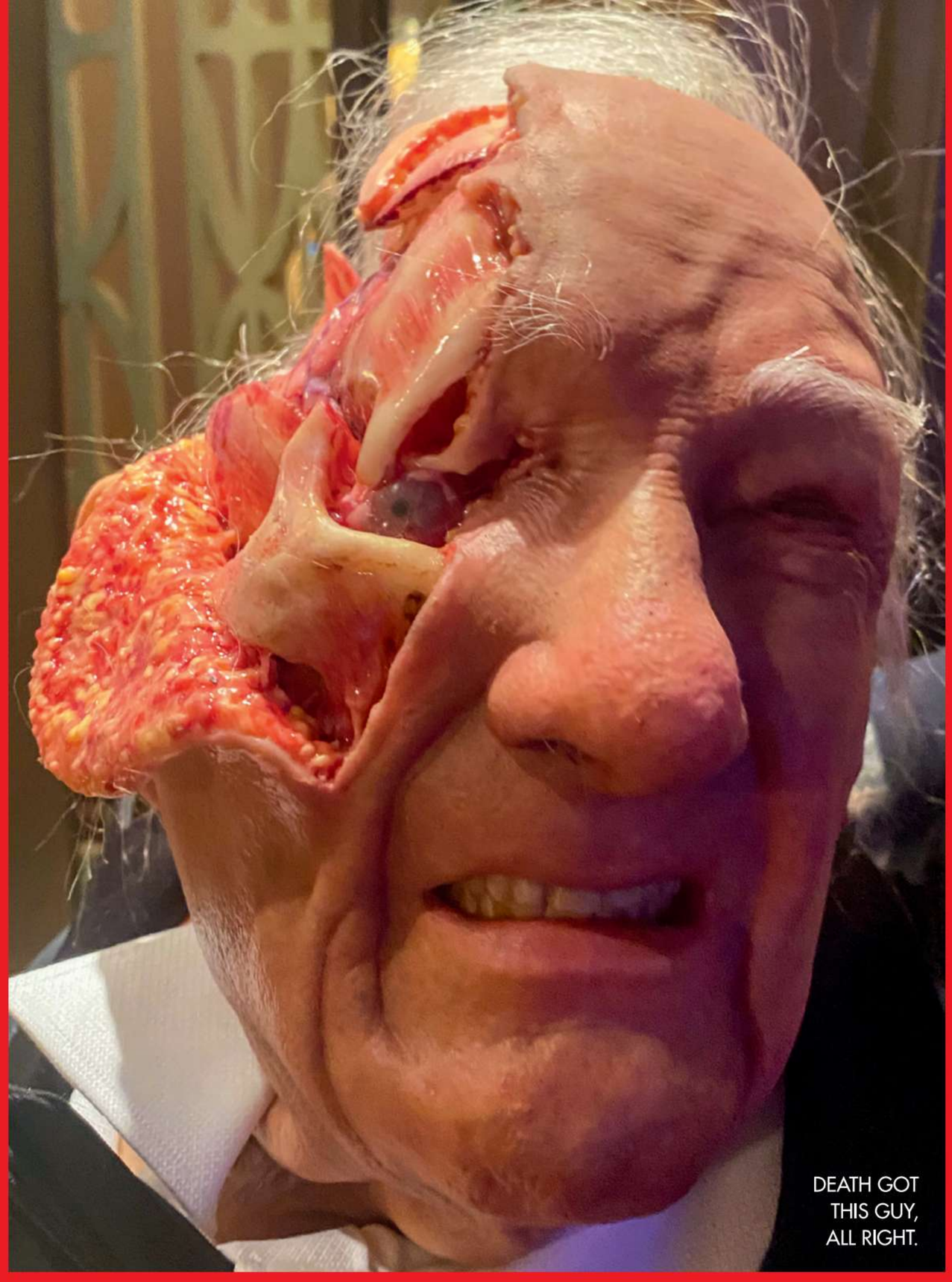
BOBBY (MAX LLOYD-JONES) CAN'T CRAWL AWAY FAST ENOUGH.

writer reminds us what else we need, and it goes around in this highly iterative way for a very long time."

Through post-production, the pair kept tinkering. With additional photography, they maximized the cringe factor with insert shots – a broken ankle here, a blood splatter there – that worked like gory punctuation marks. The co-directors also sought to subvert expectations with "surprisingly inevitable" chain reactions involving multiple characters, says Lipovsky, to make the audience question who was next on the chopping block – or on the hook, in the instance of a heavily pierced tattoo artist (Richard Harmon) who's strung up via metal chain to a ceiling fan. "When you see somebody with a nose ring or watch a garbage truck drive by, you'll think about it differently," promises Stein.

Bloodlines marks the final screen appearance of horror legend Tony Todd (*Candyman*) as William Bludworth, a menacing mortician introduced in *Final Destination* 25 years ago; equipped with an expert knowledge of Death, Bludworth warns characters about cheating fate and reveals certain rules – such as that only new life can defeat Death, a hack most helpful to Kimberly Corman (A.J. Cook) in *Final Destination 2*.

Though his origins were long shrouded in mystery, *Bloodlines* unearths Bludworth's past – and gave Todd one last opportunity to play the character before his death last November. *Bloodlines* presents Bludworth not as Death personified but as somebody who's lived enough life to grasp mortality on a deeper level. "It was always very important to us to have him in the film," says Stein. "The story gives him more layers, more backstory, than he's had before, as a real person and not just a magical figure."



DEATH GOT THIS GUY, ALL RIGHT.

For creator Jeffrey Reddick, who considered Todd "a personal idol," his involvement in *Final Destination* was "a dream come true" that added dramatic depth. "He could go through every emotion, and it was just staggering to watch, because he was a classically trained actor," says Reddick. "He took every part he played so seriously. He never phoned it in."

Perry still recalls Todd's audition for *Final Destination*: "Tony came in and – with that incredibly unique voice, that undercurrent of gravitas and menace, without being overt – made that character, Johnny Exposition, come to life. What he said that I've always loved is, 'I have a secret about Bludworth, but I'm not going to tell anyone.' He knew something, and you didn't, and that's what made you lean in. Even without a lot of screen time, you wanted to find out what was going on behind his eyes."

In declining health while filming his scenes, Todd received a hero's welcome on the Vancouver set. "He was physically weak but emotionally extremely joyful," remembers Stein. "Everybody felt how special it was," adds Lipovsky. "Even the sound guy came over to me and said, 'Can you believe we just witnessed that?'"

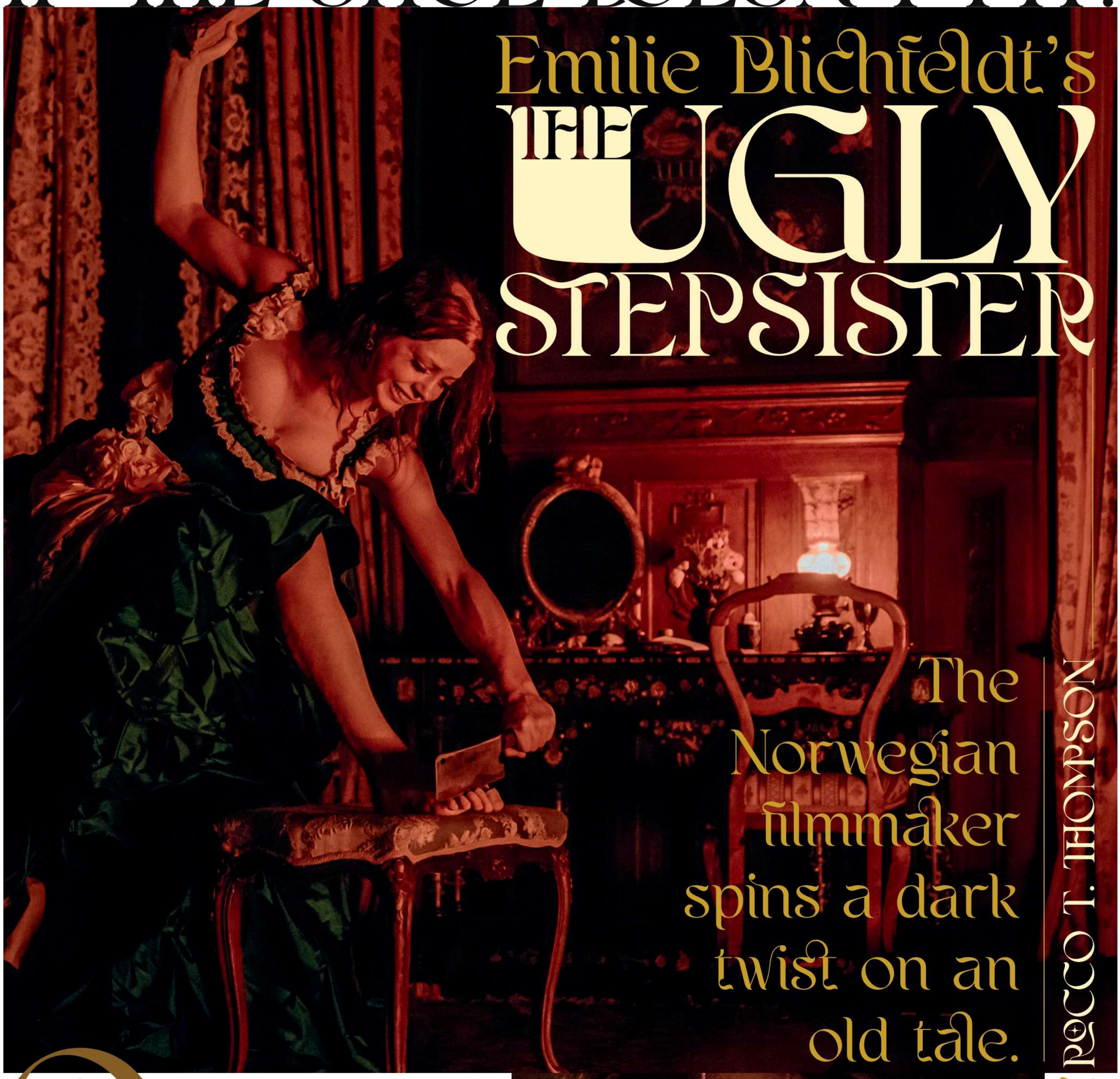
The team "made every effort to make this experience for him both memorable and meaningful; the more we tried to make him feel comfortable and appreciated, the more we got that back from him," Perry recalls. "The *Final Destination* community is large after 25 years, especially in Vancouver. People came by to see Tony, even if they weren't working, just to say hi. There's something about Tony, about the circumstances he was navigating, that made everyone come together."

What *Bloodlines* reveals about Bludworth might say more about Todd than it does the character – never more so than in his final moments on screen. Before filming, Stein and Lipovsky invited the actor to speak from the heart, not simply to his scene partners but to the fans. Standing in a doorway, what Todd says "were his words for what he wanted people to take away from his role in this franchise," Stein says.

"As we've worked on the film since his passing, the weight of what he says, and of his performance in the film, has only amplified," reflects Lipovsky. "We're proud of what we've been able to do for the character, and to give him the platform to not only say goodbye to the franchise but to his role in horror cinema. It'll give audiences a moment of healing that they've been waiting for, I think."

Death comes for us all, whether from an errant ceiling fan or in its proper time. "In his personal wisdom, Tony gave us his version of how to live your life with that knowledge, even as death was coming for him," Stein remarks. "I keep his words with me as I live my life. As he says, 'You never know when.'" 💀

IF THE SHOE DOESN'T FIT:



PHOTOS BY BY (TOP) LUKASZ BAK, (BOTTOM) MARCEL ZYSKIND, COURTESY OF SHUDDER

Opening with pressed flowers and blush-colored daydreams before collapsing in a wave of self-mutilation and wriggling barf, Emilie Blichfeldt's *The Ugly Stepsister* was snapped up by Shudder ahead of its Sundance premiere. The film refashions a popular fairytale with a Sofia Coppola eye toward feminine aesthetics alongside a Lars von Trier-esque appetite for human suffering.

"It was this image from a children's book of the stepsister on a horse with three very cartoonish red blood drops coming out of her shoe," says writer/director Blichfeldt, recalling the childhood seed that would grow into her debut feature. "I didn't see it from the outside: I was her. And I thought she was

LEA MYREN (ELVIRA) HAS TO SUFFER THE INDIGNITIES OF 1800S ORTHODONTIC CARE ON TOP OF EVERYTHING ELSE.

THE MAKEOVER MONTAGE HITS DIFFERENT IN THIS MOVIE.

Cinderella, but then she realizes, 'No, of course I'm not Cinderella, I cut off my toes to fit the shoe.' [And I felt] how ashamed she was when the prince found out what she did." She adds: "That's a striking image for what so many women do: we all know that Cinderella's shoe is impossible to fit, [but] the rest of us struggle, cutting off our toes to try to fit this impossibly small shoe that belongs to someone else."

Set in mythical 1800s Swedenlandia, *The Ugly Stepsister* tells the story of apple-cheeked braceface Elvira (Lea Myren), who, after the death of her wealthy stepfather, is groomed into more marriageable material by her unforgiving mother in a bid to keep the family financially solvent. When it's announced that the libidinous Prince Julian (Isac Calmroth) is throwing a ball to find a wife, the plain, pudgy Elvira is put through a gruesome gauntlet of beauty regimens to mold her into someone he might want, unaware that the fairytale ending she's after is reserved for her gorgeous, disregarded stepsister, Agnes (Thea Sofie Loch Næss).

> "Horror was not my thing, but I'd been working with female characters who were struggling with body issues through my shorts, and body horror became like a gateway."
>
> Emilie Blichfeldt

Blichfeldt grew up in Norway's remote Arctic Circle, and *The Ugly Stepsister* is a coproduction between Sweden, Denmark, Poland, and her home country. She cites von Trier, the region's enfant terrible, as a formative influence ("*Dogville* really shook my whole perception of what movies could be"), but body horror is what grabbed the young filmmaker still haunted by the stepsister's bloodstained pumps. She describes David Cronenberg's cinematic ideas as "body to body," rather than the more philosophical "brain to brain," and found in that dynamic a skeleton key to unlock the themes that she herself was turning over in her own work.

"Horror was not my thing, but I'd been working with female characters who were struggling with body issues through my shorts, and body horror became like a gateway," she explains. "It became obvious to me that it was a great tool to tell female stories – our existence is a very bodily experience." But to set her uniquely female approach to the popular subgenre apart, Blichfeldt has coined her own term: beauty horror.

"We tell women, 'Beauty is pain,' and I think that's really the thematic core: If there's something beautiful, does it have something horrible to it? [Beauty horror] is about playing with where one [stops] and the other begins."

The director was thrilled to have von Trier's own go-to costumer Manon Rasmussen on hand to help realize her glamorous yet grimy fantasy world of soft cloaks and hard pricks. "We worked hard to try to get this 'Once upon a time…' feeling," she says. "I found this very pleasing connection between the silhouettes I wanted for the costumes, which are from roughly 1850-1880, to the same silhouettes that Walt Disney used in his version [of *Cinderella*], which I thought was so fun to play off of."

Similarly, the torturous procedures Elvira undergoes are partially accurate, partially invented. "We have a tendency to think that changing our appearance is a very modern thing, but I wanted to link what women did to themselves in the past and what we do to ourselves today," Blichfeldt explains. Freely mixing gossip, old wives' tales, and

PHOTOS BY MARCEL ZYSKIND, COURTESY OF SHUDDER

recorded fact, she was able to create sadistic beauty treatments and augmentations as wildly disturbing as they are believable, from brutal nose-shaping apparatuses to parasitic diet aids. But the most horrific sequence of all? "[There was] hearsay from Americans talking about women in Paris sewing [false] eyelashes on with a needle and thread," she grimaces. "I don't think it happened, but I just thought it was such a striking image."

The film's small but mighty effects were accomplished as practically as possible with the help of even more von Trier regulars, Thomas Foldberg and Peter Hjorth, who took inspiration from Dario Argento's *Opera* for this especially impressive and wince-inducing set piece. "The actress was locked in position, and we had a puppeteer with us who had different eyeballs, moving them around. It was a very fun day on set!" recalls Blichfeldt. "Everyone else disappears, it's just me, the DOP, Thomas, and Peter, and Lea, the main actress, in our own microcosmos. Just us and an eye for a day." She adds, "It's the practical effects that move me the most."

Any recent mention of beauty and horror must immediately call to mind last year's surprise box office and awards season hit, *The Substance*, and, for Blichfeldt, this is a truly exciting time to be making movies about the embodied female experience.

"I find it magical how I've been lucky enough to pop up at the same time as *The Substance*," she enthuses, likening the timing to planets aligning. "Coralie Fargeat is so cool for saying, 'This is a film about the surface,' it's not a film that goes deep at all, but you can't say that it's style over substance because it is '*The Substance*.' It's so ironic. It's too much. It's insane."

When asked if *The Ugly Stepsister* and *The Substance* might be the opening salvos in a new wave of international beauty horror, Blichfeldt answers in the affirmative. "I'm interested to see where we will take this! I think we're at a time now where people really can feel how what we are doing to ourselves, how we're letting an industry take advantage of our insecurities, isn't sustainable." She continues: "I've been a victim of it myself. I know what it can do to your self-worth when your appearance is what's of value and not your insights. How you can become so self-aware, self-obsessed, the only thing you see when you meet others is your own reflection in their eyes. It's a very private experience, but I think it's very important for us to start to discuss this at a higher level. It's a deeply problematic political issue that we're all facing: for trans women, for men, for everyone."

Very much like *The Substance*, Blichfeldt uses *The Ugly Stepsister* to tackle beauty standards in a manner that feels commendably uncompromising and fresh through a character who, as the director puts it, "internalizes the view that others have given her from the outside, [which] then literally and metaphorically eats her up from the inside." Although this crucible of shattered fantasies and wrecked bodies isn't exactly a balm for the overwhelming physical inadequacies each of us confronts daily, Blichfeldt sees beauty, real beauty, in Elvira's breakdown.

"I had this vision that Elvira would be at her most beautiful in the final close-up. She's very beaten up at that point, but it's true. We love her, we've been through what she's been through, and she's so beautiful." 💀

BEHIND EVERY UGLY STEPSISTER (MYREN) IS A WICKED STEPMOTHER (ANE DAHL TORP, LEFT).

THE DEVIL'S BLUES

RYAN COOGLER ON SINNERS

BY RICHARD NEWBY

THE DIRECTOR HAS TAKEN ON BOXERS AND *BLACK PANTHER*; NOW HE SETS HIS EYE ON THE WORLD OF THE VAMPIRE.

Ryan Coogler's genre-bending *Sinners* - in which twin brothers both played by Michael B. Jordan return to their hometown in Prohibition-era Mississippi and find themselves confronting an unspeakable evil - may be the acclaimed filmmaker's first horror film, but he's been in tune with the genre's rhythm all his life. Now he's taking a bite for himself.

THIS PAGE AND FACING: MICHAEL B. JORDAN PLAYS TWINS ELIJAH AND ELIAS SMOKE, WHO THINK THEY'VE SEEN IT ALL. THEY'LL SOON LEARN THEY HAVEN'T.

You've talked about Carpenter's *The Thing* as one of the big influences on *Sinners*. You've also mentioned some other great pulls from the genre. Where did your love of horror stem from?

All my movies have been very personal to me. Coming up, I was an athlete. But I also loved comic books and genre films and the quote, unquote genre material. I would buy FANGORIA whenever I would see them at the newsstand. They call me an elder millennial. [*laughs*] Like a lot of them, I read *Goosebumps* books. But my Gen X cousins were products of that slasher era. So, all the movies they would show me scared the shit out of us.

My parents and I loved horror movies and grindhouse cinema. My dad's favorite movie was *Rocky*, but his second favorite was *Halloween*. We watched *The Twilight Zone* marathon every New Year's. We had movie nights with my family. Everyone came to my house when I lived in Oakland and Richmond. We'd go to Blockbuster and put down as much money as we could, and we'd leap up out of there and we'd see who was going to stay up the whole night. We were running movies back-to-back, you feel me? And 70% of what we grabbed would be horror movies.

What made now the right time in your career to explore horror with *Sinners*?

Panther II took a lot longer than it was intended to, due to tragedy [the death of *Black Panther* star Chadwick Boseman]. Tragedy, with us personally, the group of artists I made those movies with. But also, the international tragedy that was the pandemic. It was also a movie very affected by the pandemic. So, it was a lot of time. I had been a professional filmmaker for a decade and realized I hadn't done an entry in a zone very important to me.

So, coming off of *Panther II*, I was like, 'Man, now would be a great time to make a movie that speaks to that honest part of myself.' I get excited about horror movies. They've got a special place in my heart. You know what I'm saying?

"WHAT'S SO EXCITING ABOUT HORROR FILMS IS YOU CAN BE UNAPOLOGETIC WITH EVERYTHING." -Ryan Coogler

Absolutely. We've got similar horror entry points. I also watched those *Twilight Zone* marathons.

What's your favorite one?

'Eye of the Beholder.'

All right, so 'Eye of the Beholder' is the one where everybody gets the pig faces?

Yeah, that's the one.

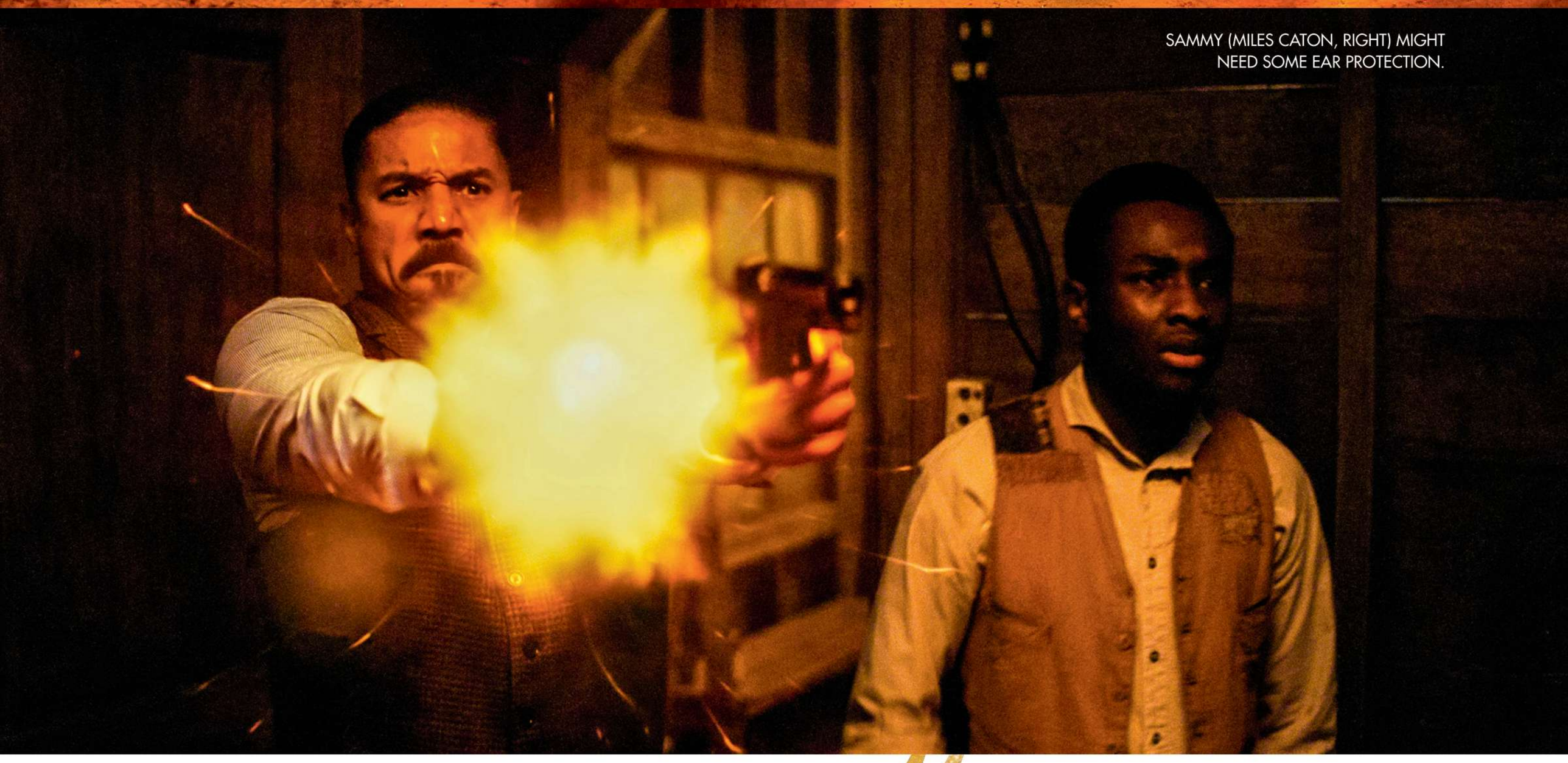
I love that one. I mean, that dude was a genius, bro. I love them all. I mentioned in an interview that my favorite one is 'The Last Rites of Jeff Myrtlebank.'

Which I re-watched after you mentioned that.

Oh shit. Okay. Well, you ready for the movie then, because the movie is more of that than it

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT INC.

HAILEE STEINFELD IS *SINNERS'* FANG FATALE, MARY.



SAMMY (MILES CATON, RIGHT) MIGHT NEED SOME EAR PROTECTION.

is anything else. It's so underrated because it's so different from the others, I think because of how funny it is.

[*Twilight Zone* creator Rod] Serling could chill you to your core, but he had this incredible sense of humor, too. From what I've seen of your film, there's also that balance of horror and humor.

I love to laugh while I'm being scared. It's the best feeling. This film has regional humor. It's humor that feels very much of that place. Like the doctor in 'Myrtlebank,' him making shit up on the spot, and the way people refer to what Jeff was like when he was still alive. They got all these different ways of saying he was lazy. It's a community type of humor. To me, it's one of the funniest parts about *Sinners*. And also, that idea of the South being slow, and people not being as sharp. But you realize when you're around them, they are so sharp. They'll talk shit about you without you even knowing. They'll talk shit about you when you think that they're giving you a compliment. I was interested in seeing how much of that the film could hold. The wisdom, the sharpness, the hustle, but also, the superstition, the traditionalism, the judgment, all of that that can be held in that part of the world at the same time.

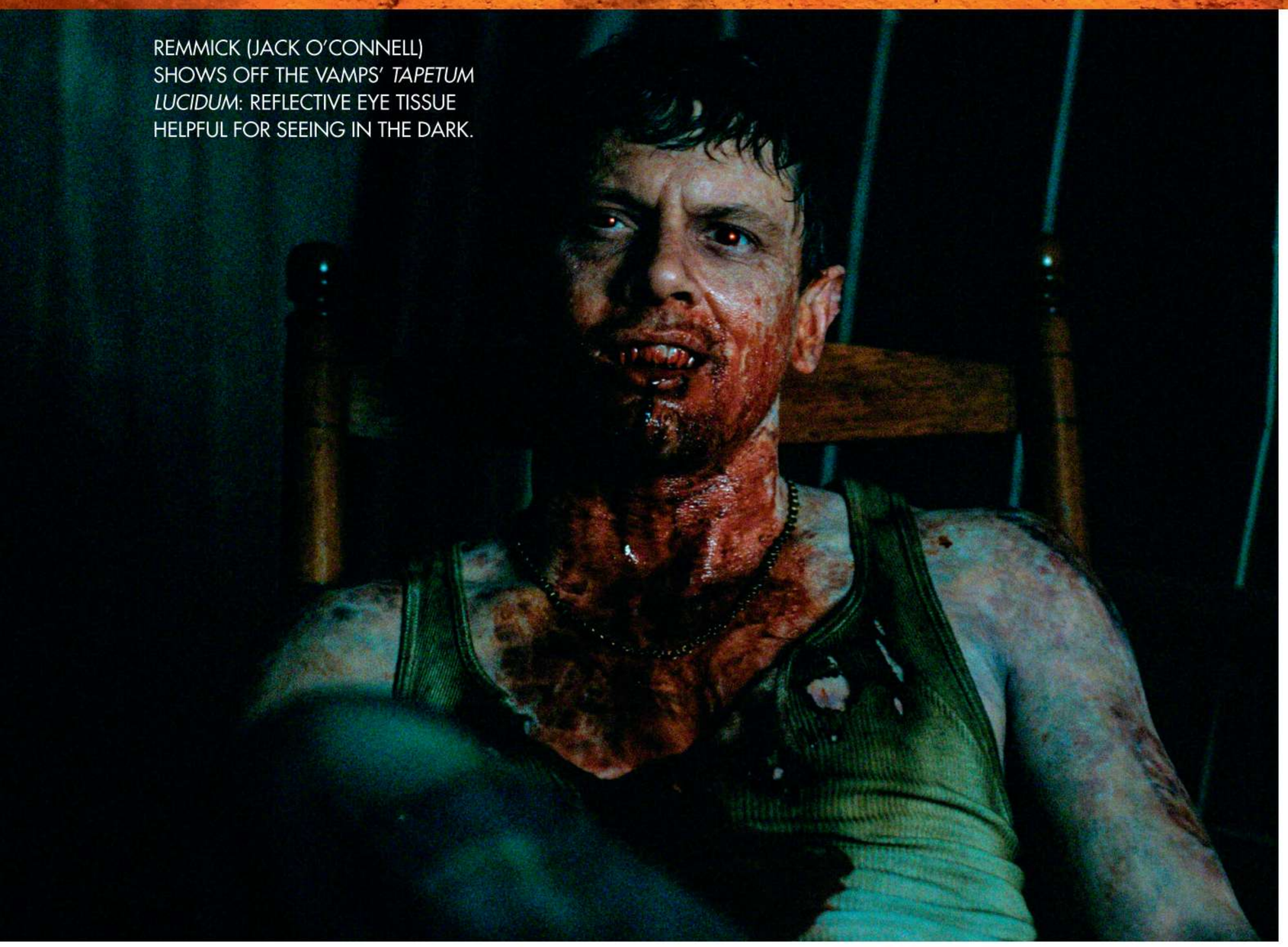
Music is a huge part of *Sinners*. You're reuniting with Ludwig Göransson on this who isn't only composing but also producing. I'd love to hear about the soundscape you guys created and your influences.

Ludwig's wife Serena [McKinney] is our executive music producer, and she's a lifelong professional musician. She played that violin piece on *Oppenheimer* and played violin on *Creed*. The score is insane. It sounds crazy saying that because of what Ludwig's done, but this one feels different. We agreed to push ourselves on this and leave it all on the screen and in the speakers.

What's so exciting about horror films is you can be unapologetic with everything. The biggest thing though is that the movie is about music, and the rituals surrounding it. It's about many things, but the main thing is a supernaturally gifted musician at the heart of this. The film has its own mythos about what that means. Someone who knows about the mythology surrounding American music will know what we're quoting from.

> "I'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING LIKE THIS. THE CLOSEST I CAME TO IT WAS WITH *CREED*. BUT THIS WAS CRAZY. YOUR CLOTHES GET RUINED. WE HAD DIFFERENT COLORS OF BLOOD. SOME OF THE SCENES WERE A SLIPPING HAZARD." -Ryan Coogler

We're dealing with 1930s Mississippi. For Ludwig, before he was anything, he was a guitarist. And the reason he's a guitarist is because his father was inspired by Chuck Berry. His father was a guitarist in Sweden and became a guitar teacher and taught his son. That's how he came to music, from this Black American music that evolved to what we now know as rock and roll. So, we got to



REMMICK (JACK O'CONNELL) SHOWS OFF THE VAMPS' *TAPETUM LUCIDUM*: REFLECTIVE EYE TISSUE HELPFUL FOR SEEING IN THE DARK.

go back to the root of it. He bought a bunch of guitars that were made in the time the movie is set. He's playing them, but he's also got these incredible musicians on his movie. Carpenter was a big influence. Him the composer as opposed to the filmmaker. There's big-time inspirations like that, Delta Blues, and a lot of the regional evolution.

Sinners is your fifth collaboration with Michael B. Jordan. Tell me about his approach to playing twins.

Mike attacked it from a ground-up kind of way. This was a little bit different from our previous works. The twins are Black Prohibition gangsters. We worked a lot on what it means to be an identical twin, and how these two guys are subtly different. If you were to ask them before the sun goes down in this movie, if they've seen everything that can scare a person, they would say yeah. They've seen the worst of it. And then they meet someone completely unexpected. *Predator* is a good example of what we were going for. Those soldiers thought they'd seen everything, but they didn't know just how crazy it was going to get.

We know you've got vampires in this, but you've teased some other supernatural elements in the mix. Sidestepping spoilers, could you tell me a little bit about working with the practical effects team? We saw a lot of blood in that latest trailer.

So much fun! We worked with a guy, Mike Fontaine, and his team, and a makeup designer named Sian Richards, who helped define the look. Makeup head Ken Diaz, who I worked with on *Panther*, was in the mix, too. Man, it was something special. I've never done anything like this. The closest I came to it was with *Creed*. But this was crazy. Your clothes get ruined. We had different colors of blood. Some of the scenes were a slipping hazard. [*laughs*] But I was living the dream, man. Fontaine is brilliant. How I found him, was a movie he did called *Green Room*. You see that?

Great movie!

I absolutely loved it. Parts made me turn away from the screen. So, I wanted some of that in this. He's exceptional. A lot of the time you'll meet people that skilled and they can be very rigid. But he was game, ready to go if we had an idea on the day.

Did you have any specific influences on the look of the vampires? I love the nocturnal eyes element.

Yeah, yeah! It's called *tapetum lucidum*. We're not the first film to do that but we worked with an exceptional woman who makes contacts for the film. This is the first time these prototypes are being used. The actors can't see once they put them on. We got blood on the floor and shit, so it was complicated. We had an amazing visual effects team led by Michael Ralla. We were able to use those practical contacts as a base to accentuate the look. For Fontaine, man, it was just a question of, 'What are our vampire fangs going to look like?' We made a whole database of all the stuff that's been done before, which was really fun. We ended up settling on something subtle but distinct. But the big thing we have in the film is variation and diversion. Not all the vampires are alike.

JORDAN'S BRINGING A GUN *AND* A KNIFE TO THIS FIGHT.

PHOTO (BOTTOM) BY ELI ADÉ

SINNERS MARKS JORDAN'S FIFTH COLLABORATION WITH DIRECTOR RYAN COOGLER (RIGHT, FOREGROUND).

PHOTO BY ELI ADÉ

So much of the film relates to history and the impact and contributions of Black Americans on American history, through music and culture. It seems, like your previous films, part of *Sinners* is grappling with what was stolen from us. Given the current climate of America, and the fight we've been having to retain and reclaim our history, was that something that was on your mind as you were making this movie? The importance of making sure Black history, even in the horror genre, is treated as American history, as something lasting and permanent?

That's a great question, man. I would say it's always on my mind, regardless of the specific political climate or administration. What's beautiful about making movies, and what's difficult, is they take a long time. When I sat down to write this, it was a different administration. And obviously, it's always a tense political climate, every second of my life. You know what I mean. It's always the lived experience, the day-to-day. There's always the topics you encounter on the news, and now with social media, what's being discussed there is what's being discussed in any particular industry. Whether you're in entertainment or you're in business, we're facing the same discussions. These things tend to shift. But from my own situation, they also tend to stay the same. I try to do just what's true to me, at the time, and make it the absolute best I can make it. For me, that involves making sure I got the best collaborators I can work with, making sure the project's got a studio that'll support it. You always try to cut through the noise because it's always moving. You want to connect with something that's true. The truth, I like to believe, is not moving. Even though there are often attempts to try to move it. But I think if you can make something that resonates, that's the best thing you can do as an artist.

Are there other horror filmmakers or films, new or old, you feel are getting at this truth, that feels necessary to this moment?

I think they all do, man. What's great about when you've got time removed from things, you get more perspective. I do think the horror genre is a timeless genre. When a horror movie's good enough, it's like it always existed. I remember the first time watching *Get Out*, and it was like the Sunken Place was always a thing. Almost overnight, you know what I mean?

I found *The Substance* very moving. I watched it on my own and then I watched it with my wife. The truth of the movie hit me as a man, but it hit her in an entirely different way. There were lines in the movie where I thought, 'Man, that's just crazy. That's the movie being a movie.' And then she's like, 'Oh no, people have said shit like that to me.' And I'm like, 'What?'

But in terms of an older one I saw recently where I'm like, 'Oh yeah, this is one that's going to live forever,' was *Don't Look Now*. I watched that in preparation for *Sinners*. It's like a challenge on what a horror movie can be. It hit me like a fuckin ton of bricks. A masterclass in personal relationships, tension, and characters who could be in any kind of movie.

What do you hope audiences take away from *Sinners*?

Honestly, I just want them to have a good time, man. There's a lot there for people who are into different things. So, I hope the elements are attractive and satisfying, and that people are surprised. For me, if it wasn't for the experience of sitting in a cinema and being moved by something, and hearing my neighbors in the dark react, it wouldn't have led me to this life that I'm in right now, that I love. I'm trying to give that experience back to people.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity. 💀

Skeletour

World Tour 2025

APR	15	MANCHESTER, UK	AO ARENA	JUL	9	BALTIMORE, MD	CFG BANK ARENA
APR	16	GLASGOW, UK	OVO HYDRO	JUL	11	ATLANTA, GA	STATE FARM ARENA
APR	19	LONDON, UK	THE O2 ARENA	JUL	12	TAMPA, FL	AMALIE ARENA
APR	20	BIRMINGHAM, UK	UTILITA ARENA	JUL	13	MIAMI, FL	KASEYA CENTER
APR	22	ANTWERP, BE	SPORTPALEIS	JUL	15	RALEIGH, NC	LENOVO CENTER
APR	23	FRANKFURT, DE	FESTHALLE	JUL	17	CLEVELAND, OH	ROCKET MORTGAGE FIELDHOUSE
APR	24	MUNICH, DE	OLYMPIAHALLE	JUL	18	PITTSBURGH, PA	PPG PAINTS ARENA
APR	26	LYON, FR	LDLC ARENA	JUL	19	PHILADELPHIA, PA	WELLS FARGO CENTER
APR	27	TOULOUSE, FR	ZENITH	JUL	21	BOSTON, MA	TD GARDEN
APR	29	LISBON, PT	MEO ARENA	JUL	22	NEW YORK, NY	MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
APR	30	MADRID, ES	PALACIO VISTALEGRE	JUL	24	DETROIT, MI	LITTLE CAESARS ARENA
MAY	3	ZURICH, CH	HALLENSTADION	JUL	25	LOUISVILLE, KY	KFC YUM! CENTER
MAY	4	MILAN, IT	UNIPOL FORUM	JUL	26	NASHVILLE, TN	BRIDGESTONE ARENA
MAY	7	BERLIN, DE	UBER ARENA	JUL	28	GRAND RAPIDS, MI	VAN ANDEL ARENA
MAY	8	AMSTERDAM, NL	ZIGGO DOME	JUL	29	MILWAUKEE, WI	FISERV FORUM
MAY	10	LODZ, PL	ATLAS ARENA	JUL	30	ST. LOUIS, MO	ENTERPRISE CENTER
MAY	11	PRAGUE, CZ	O2 ARENA	AUG	1	ROSEMONT, IL	ALLSTATE ARENA
MAY	13	PARIS, FR	ACCOR ARENA	AUG	2	SAINT PAUL, MN	XCEL ENERGY CENTER
MAY	14	OBERHAUSEN, DE	RUDOLF WEBER-ARENA	AUG	3	OMAHA, NE	CHI HEALTH CENTER
MAY	15	HANNOVER, DE	ZAG ARENA	AUG	5	KANSAS CITY, MO	T-MOBILE CENTER
MAY	17	COPENHAGEN, DK	ROYAL ARENA	AUG	7	DENVER, CO	BALL ARENA
MAY	20	TAMPERE, FI	NOKIA ARENA	AUG	9	LAS VEGAS, NV	MGM GRAND GARDEN ARENA
MAY	22	LINKÖPING, SE	SAAB ARENA	AUG	10	SAN DIEGO, CA	VIEJAS ARENA
MAY	23	SANDVIKEN, SE	GÖRANSSON ARENA	AUG	11	PHOENIX, AZ	FOOTPRINT CENTER
MAY	24	OSLO, NO	SPEKTRUM	AUG	14	AUSTIN, TX	MOODY CENTER
				AUG	15	FORT WORTH, TX	DICKIES ARENA
				AUG	16	HOUSTON, TX	TOYOTA CENTER
				SEP	24	MEXICO CITY, MX	PALACIO DE LOS DEPORTES
				SEP	25	MEXICO CITY, MX	PALACIO DE LOS DEPORTES

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Eternal Darkness

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BLACK VAMPIRES IN FILM

BY CAROLYN MAURICETTE

AS QUEEN AKASHA, AALIYAH WAS A POWERFUL STANDOUT IN THE OTHERWISE LACKLUSTER *QUEEN OF THE DAMNED*.

WE'RE INVITING YOU IN TO WITNESS THE EVOLUTION OF A TIME-HONORED SUBGENRE.

There's no supernatural creature more fascinating than the vampire. From Bela Lugosi's Universal Monster through Gary Oldman's decked-out bloodsucker, all the way to this year's mustachioed ghoul played by Bill Skarsgård, cinematic vampires have compelled audiences for nearly a century, and they've haunted readers from the page for even longer. Despite the archetypal vampire's European beginnings – ranging from parasitic peasants to capitalists draining the poor – there are countless global representations keeping the bloodsucking tradition intact, and none is more intriguing than the Black vampire. Interrogating themes of othering, mixed bloodlines and unapologetic sensual delights, the Black vampire is culturally unique within the Black diaspora. As a precursor to visionary Ryan Coogler's new vampire film *Sinners*, out April 18, let's delve into some of the most memorable melanated vampires in recent cinematic history.

THOUGH LARGELY SILENT IN HER ROLE, GRACE JONES CAPTIVATES AS KATRINA IN *VAMP*.

Audiences are all too familiar with the succubus, a supernatural creature whose spellbinding sensuality holds power over men. We can see her represented by several Black characters in cinematic history going back decades. These examples explore wide-reaching themes including the AIDS epidemic, sexual taboos and the demonization of Black women's sexuality. In 1990's *Def by Temptation* and 1986's *Vamp*, Temptation (Cynthia Bond) and Katrina (Grace Jones) are at the top of that list. These are two unforgettable, unapologetic vampires who, close to forty years later, are lasting icons in Black horror.

Around the same time, there was *Vampire's Kiss*, which hit theatres in 1988. The beautiful Rachel (Jennifer Beals) bites Peter (Nicolas Cage) during a one-night stand. She overstays her welcome after a few surprise visits, but viewers are never made certain if she is a sultry specter living in the unhinged Peter's head, or a real succubus feeding off his blood and driving him mad.

Surrealist French cult filmmaker Jean Rollin's first film, *Le viol du vampire (Rape of the Vampire)*, is important because it offers one of the first sightings of a Black vampire in cinema. In the second half of the film, a vampire queen (Jacqueline Sieger) tries to thwart dissent and rule over her minions as they collect women for her to feed upon. A surprising addition to this 1968 arthouse nightmare, this supernatural Beatnik queen is Black, beautiful and powerful.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention another vampire royal: Queen Akasha from *Queen of the Damned*. Michael Rymer's 2002 film adaptation of Anne Rice's third installment in her 13-novel saga, *The Vampire Chronicles*, was a cinematic flop, but it's known for the greatly mourned R&B star Aaliyah's singular performance. Aaliyah smolders as Queen Akasha, the mother of all vampires. Once awakened by the vampire rockstar Lestat (played in the film by Stuart Townsend), Akasha wants to rule the world. The Black community lost their collective minds when we watched Aaliyah slink across the floor in that iconic nightclub scene. Terrifyingly graceful, she reveled in her power, crushing all in her wake with a flick of her wrist.

While in Anne Rice territory, we must talk about the latest version of her smash hit *Interview with a Vampire*. The first book of *The Vampire Chronicles*, written in 1976, tells of a vampire named Louis de Pointe du Lac who decides it's time to reveal his 200-year existence to a young reporter: how he became a vampire by his maker, the narcissistic aforementioned Lestat, and their turbulent relationship. First seen in the 1994 film starring heartthrobs Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt, the story was reimagined into an AMC television series beginning in 2022. This time, Louis is a queer Black man played by Jacob Anderson, and he's seduced to vampirism by the white Lestat (Sam Reid). Louis' portrayal here is a much more believable iteration, especially coming as he does from 1910s New Orleans, where racial mixing was part and parcel of that corner of the South.

Speaking of racial mixing, let's discuss the "one-drop" rule. The old-school racist measurement of Blackness in your bloodline is turned on its head when it comes to Black vampires. Some live in that liminal space between humans and bloodsuckers, unleashing themes of

self-loathing and othering enforced by colonialism. We all know that *Blade* fits that bill. There's so much juicy subtext to explore with Blade (Wesley Snipes) and his mother, Vanessa (Sanaa Lathan): His half-vamp status makes him loathe his lineage, while his mother enjoys her vampire abilities.

Two vampire brides-to-be also explore this blood quotient. In *A Vampire in Brooklyn*, directed by late horror great Wes Craven in 1995, Rita (Angela Bassett) is a half-vampire woman pursued by the campy Maximillian (Eddie Murphy), who aims to make her his full vamp bride. And then there's Evie (Nathalie Emmanuel) in 2022's *The Invitation*, a biracial woman whose white relatives are directly tied to Dracula, and she's destined to become one of his vampire brides. Both women use their vampire status to fight evil and regain their humanity.

But wait – there's even more vampire blood mixing to be had! On the flip side of this coin is the more traditional drop of Black blood that turns Dracula's wife, Vampira, into a Black woman. In the 1973 slightly problematic (as in, David Niven in blackface problematic) horror comedy *Old Dracula*, an oxymoronic aging Dracula (David Niven) revives his comatose, anemic vampire wife with a blood transfusion from a Black Playboy model, immediately darkening her skin. A true beauty, Vampira (TV star Teresa Graves) revels in the added melanin. Annoyed by her new look, Dracula sets out to switch Vampira back to white but becomes a convert to Black culture in this clunky, social commentary caper (re-branded from its original title of *Vampira* to be a companion to Mel Brook's *Young Frankenstein*), preaching that "Black is beautiful."

Wealthy vampires are a well-known trope, but in the classic 1973 film *Ganja & Hess*, education, class, and Blackness add nuance to the concept. After being stabbed by his unstable colleague, George (Bill Gunn, who also directed), Black anthropologist Hess Green (Duane Jones) is plagued with an ancient vampire curse. Hyper-aware of his social standing as a wealthy Black intellectual, he's tortured by this clash of bloodlust and intellect. When he falls for George's widow, Ganja (Marlene Clark), he turns her into a vampire. Their hunger takes on a sensual, ritualistic exploration into addiction, obsession and ancestry. We also see Ganja embrace her new status at the finale, an empowering stance for a Black woman at that time. This groundbreaking movie characterizes the Black experience in genre film with so much impact that it's considered a necessary entry in the canon today. Spike Lee's grating 2014 reimagining of this classic, *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus*, is

EVIE (NATHALIE EMMANUEL) BECOMES AN UNWITTING VAMPIRE BRIDE IN *THE INVITATION*.

BLACULA (WILLIAM MARSHALL) REMAINS THE UNDISPUTED CHAMPION OF THE SUBGENRE.

JENNIFER BEALS HAUNTS NICOLAS CAGE IN *VAMPIRE'S KISS*.

worth mentioning for its modern spin on the tale, but it can't hold a candle to the intensity of the original.

The 1972 Blaxploitation hit *Blacula*, officially a prince but king of them all, caps our exploration of Black vampires. 18th-century African Prince Mamuwalde (William Marshall) attempts to negotiate the end of the slave trade but is instead disrespected by Count Dracula (Charles Macaulay) – bitten, cursed as "Blacula," and left to rot in a coffin. Two hundred years later, Blacula is shipped to L.A. and awakened, falling for the reincarnation of his beloved wife, Luva (Vonetta McGee). Not only was Prince Mamuwalde a champion who strove to abolish the slave trade, but he was also a tragic figure, forced to succumb to his supernatural urges yet yearning to be reunited with his lost love. We see him again in 1973 with *Scream Blacula Scream*, where he enlists a newly appointed voodoo queen, Lisa Fortier (Pam Grier), to remove the vampire curse. Marshall's theatrical pedigree and deep voice made him perfect for playing this dignified vampire.

Honorable mention goes to Amy (Saniyya Sidney), a weaponized vampire in the 2019 TV series *The Passage*, the roller-skating silent vamp Belle (Russell Clark), and their queen Regina Dandridge (Julie Carmen who identifies as part Afro-Cuban) in *Fright Night 2*, and the beloved Tara Thornton (Rutina Wesley) in the hit HBO series *True Blood*. And yes, the late, great Tony Todd also played a 300-year-old vampire in the 2009 B-movie *Vampire in Vegas*, but he always gave us the best version of the characters he played.

Iconic and obscure alike, Black vampires are supernatural standouts, and I can't wait to experience Coogler's interpretation. For more on Black Horror, check out Giselle Liza Anatol's *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature of the Circum-Caribbean and African Diaspora*; Mark H. Harris and Robin. R Means Coleman's entertaining *The Black Guy Dies First*, and the Black horror archive, *Graveyard Shift Sisters*, curated by academic Ashlee Blackwell, producer of the hit 2019 documentary *Horror Noire*, available on Shudder.

WESLEY SNIPES AS *BLADE*, THE DAYWALKER.

Fleshing Out Frendo: The FX of Clown in a Cornfield

A conversation with the professionals contributing to your clown phobia.

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

It was one thing to create the freaky Frendo mask seen throughout *Clown in a Cornfield*, but the film's makeup department head Doug Morrow came up with the perfect way to confirm just how scarifying it was. He took inspiration from a line originally spoken by Lon Chaney, and referenced in a film Morrow worked on nearly thirty years ago: the Christopher Plummer/Margot Kidder-starrer *The Clown at Midnight*.

THIS PAGE AND FACING: FRENDO THE CLOWN UNLEASHES A CIRCUS OF CARNAGE WITHOUT EVER LOSING HIS SMILE.

"One of the lines I've always remembered from that movie," he says, "is when one of the characters says that when you see a clown in a circus, it's not scary, but if you open your front door at midnight and there's a clown standing there, it's terrifying. That's definitely true, as far as I'm concerned.

"So when I had a prototype of the mask finished, painted with the hair on it and whatnot, I wanted to do something similar, to show the filmmakers that this would work. One day when they went on a location scout, I drove over to the studio and talked to the first AD in secret. I said, 'When you guys come back from the scout, I want you to bring everybody into the costume department.' I went in there and put on the mask, a clown suit, the whole thing. I stood in one of the change rooms, which had a curtain on it, and everyone was told when they got off the bus that they had to come to wardrobe, because there was something the costume designer needed to show everyone.

"When they all assembled, we had a little word, a signal for me to burst out of that changing room. Which is what I did, and proceeded to scare the shit out of them. That's how I sold them on what the mask would look like, and they were all very happy."

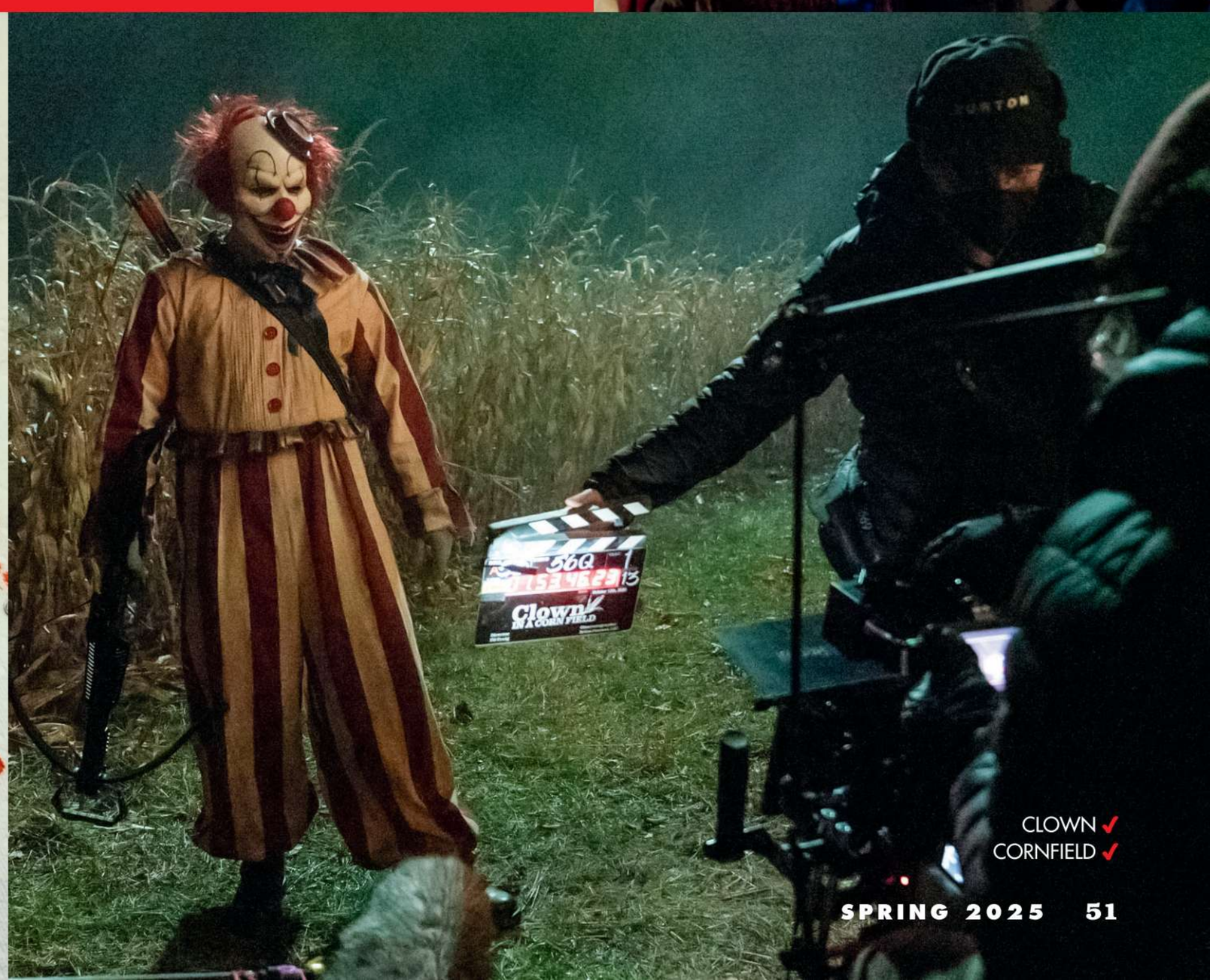
In *Clown in a Cornfield*, Frendo has that effect on many of the residents of Kettle Springs, Missouri, as the mascot of the local Baypen corn syrup company comes to violent life.

FRENDO AND DIRECTOR ELI CRAIG (*TUCKER & DALE VS. EVIL*).

Newcomer to town Quinn Maybrook (Katie Douglas) falls in with a group of her fellow high-school students who make their own Frendo horror movies, and soon they find themselves living one.

Since Frendo is a visual motif in Kettle Springs, his visage was created by *Clown in a Cornfield*'s production design team and not the makeup department. "He's in the images on the corn syrup bottles and the building where they manufactured it and things like that," Morrow explains. "They did a whole bunch of drawings, and then [director] Eli [Craig] and the producers picked one and sent it to me, and it was my job to turn that into a three-dimensional reality. I tried to adhere

PHOTOS BY SHAUNA TOWLEY AND BRIAN PEARSON COURTESY OF RLJE FILMS AND SHUDDER



CLOWN ✓
CORNFIELD ✓

to it as closely as I could; it's always a challenge translating a [two]-dimensional image into three-dimensional reality. It was a very fast turnaround, so I sculpted the mask up to a certain point and then started sending them 360-degree videos of what it was looking like. They were very specific about how big the smile should be; there was a tongue I sculpted in that we kept for a while, and they ultimately decided they didn't want that.

"Just trying to make it scary, and identifiable, was one of the most important things," he continues. "This isn't a prosthetic makeup; it's a rubber mask, so it differs from some other clown looks in that respect."

Morrow also created a number of prosthetic illusions for the film, many of which he would then hand over to *Clown in a Cornfield*'s physical FX team, headed by coordinator Casey Markus and foreperson Jason Wilkins. They were the ones who handled the active gore and mayhem gags; as Wilkins puts it, "If it moves, it was us, and if it doesn't, it was [Morrow]. Because we're not sculptors, right? So Doug would do the casting, make the mold, create the appliance, and then we'd bloody it up. For the cut-off hand, for example, Doug built that stump, and then we piped it and pumped the blood through it."

And there was quite a lot of blood pumped over the course of the *Cornfield* shoot. "I think up until this point, it was the bloodiest thing we'd done," Markus says. "We were pretty much given free rein to get gory."

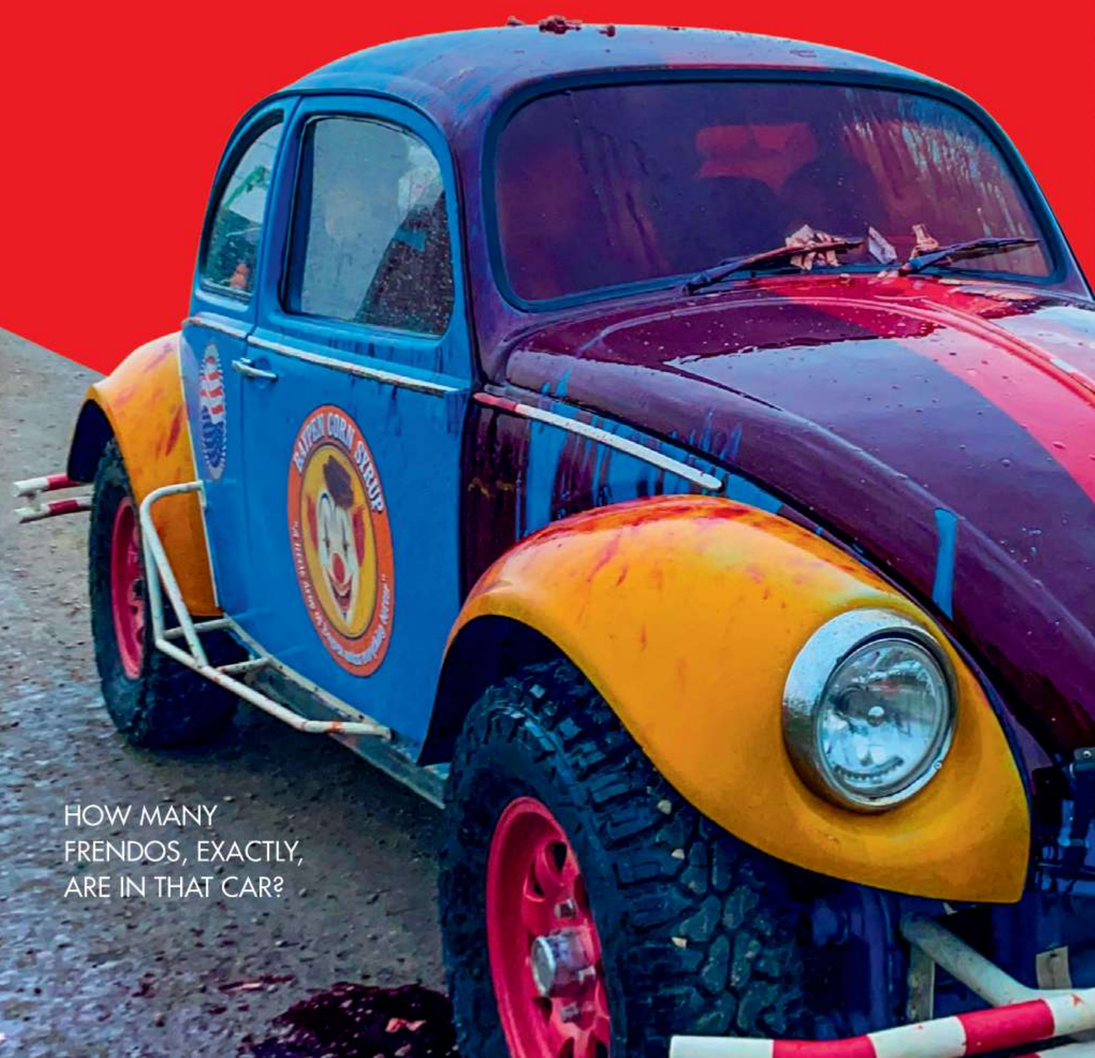
"During the full-on berserk that happens at the party," Wilkins says, "Frendo comes up to one young lady with a chainsaw, and we were just pelting her with blood. We build this little cranky-arm thing with some flappers on it, and we just kept throwing blood at her. Casey was fucking covered with it. That was probably one of the messiest ones."

One of *Cornfield*'s most impressive setpieces also involved multiple teams, when Frendo pitchforks a victim and thrusts her up to the ceiling, shattering a light fixture. "That was three departments coming together," Wilkins explains. "Set decoration in the choice of the light fixture, the stunt team, and us.

FRENDO & ELI VS. SANITY.

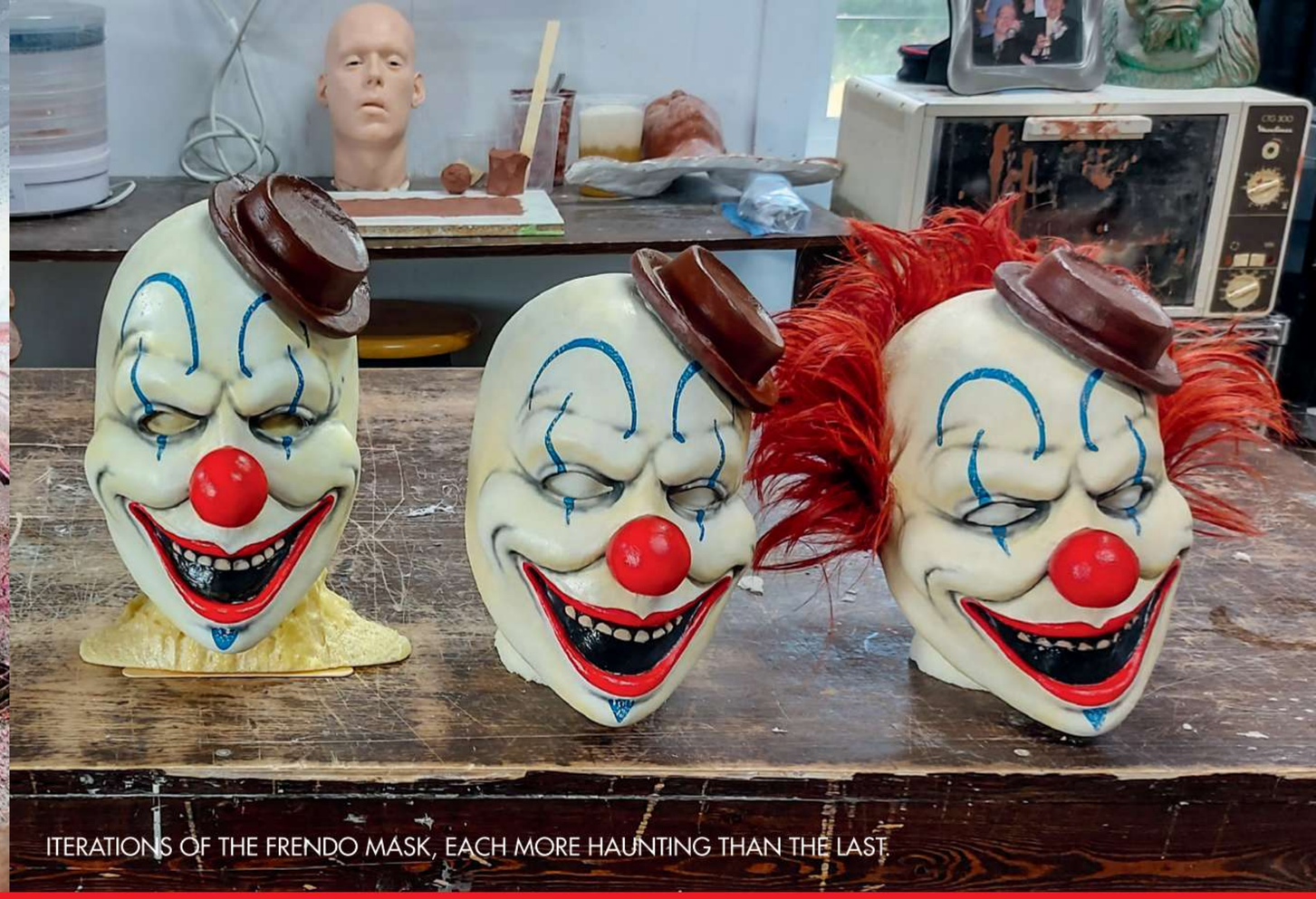
AYO SOLANKE (TUCKER) AND FRENDO CLOWNING AROUND BEHIND THE SCENES.

CASSANDRA POTENZA (JANET) AND CRAIG ARE HAVING A JOLLY OLD TIME.



HOW MANY FRENDOS, EXACTLY, ARE IN THAT CAR?

SPECIAL EFFECTS FOREMAN JASON WILKINS BLOODIES UP THE JOINT.



ITERATIONS OF THE FRENDO MASK, EACH MORE HAUNTING THAN THE LAST.

We actually drilled a hole in the ceiling from the room upstairs; it was an empty house at the time, so we had a little bit more room to play there. We ran a line through that hole, attached onto the back of the stuntperson. I don't think there was much active blood on that one – something built into the pitchfork, maybe?"

"Nothing on the pitchfork, it was on the stuntperson," Markus chimes in.

"And then we had the sparking effect," Wilkins continues. "That's all real sparks; we threw some pyro in behind her, and then it was 'One, two, three, *go*!' The stunt team had a rig upstairs that went through a back window and outside so they could yank the stuntperson up, and then standing by with the pyrotechnics, and there was breakaway glass on the fixture. There was quite a bit of, I don't want to say worry, but that was one that people were watching, because it was high-impact."

Wilkins' favorite *Cornfield* kill scene, however, involves a character getting splattered on the front of a car – a scene pointing up the desire of both the FX artists and director Craig to shoot the gore live instead of adding it digitally later. "That rig was super-cool," Wilkins says. "We had a bunch of air cannons full of blood, and detritus attached to the front of the car, and getting to push all that across the windshield was pretty fun. That was all practical, which was fantastic. Even the wipers going; we had to modify those a little, so they were pushing harder. We changed what the wiper blade was made out of, to make sure it took the blood away. I was quite happy with that one."

Of course, these days, when you're making a killer clown film with lots of blood, there's an unavoidable (white) elephant in the room, by the name of Art. But comparisons to the *Terrifier* franchise weren't a concern for *Cornfield*'s makeup and FX artisans. "It wasn't for Casey and I," Wilkins says. "In terms of the larger creative team, I'm not sure. We had seen Eli's first film, *Tucker and Dale vs. Evil*, so we knew we were trying to be in that neighborhood, and have some fun with it and a bit of blood. I don't know if they ever considered themselves as competing directly against *Terrifier*."

Indeed, *Clown in a Cornfield* now takes a place in the long pantheon of feature films playing on the childhood coulrophobia so many people have experienced. The three artists interviewed here aren't among them, however, and Morrow notes how Chaney, and his turns behind the greasepaint, captured his imagination instead.

"I have the book *Faces, Forms, Films: The Artistry of Lon Chaney*, and in there are some of his clown makeups. I remember looking at it as a kid, probably 9 or 10, fascinated that this guy could make himself look like the Hunchback of Notre Dame, the Phantom of the Opera, and a clown. So I was never really scared of those kinds of things when I was young. I was more intrigued by how they were done." 💀

IT'S A GOOD THING FRENDO'S A CORN SYRUP MASCOT, BECAUSE IT LOOKS LIKE THEY WENT THROUGH PLENTY OF CORN SYRUP ON THIS SHOOT.

CROWING around in KETTLE SPRINGS

CLOWN IN A CORNFIELD started as a popular book series. Now the author is visiting the town he invented to witness the mayhem in person.

By Adam Cesare

THIS PAGE AND FACING: THE AUTHOR ON SET WITH THE TOWN AND CLOWN OF HIS IMAGINATION.

I pack light: jeans, two t-shirts, phone charger, and a copy of Richard Kelly's *Southland Tales* on Blu-ray.

There aren't any direct flights between Philly and Winnipeg, so during my layover in Toronto I stare at my hands and listen to an audiobook. Not a horror novel. No Paul Tremblay or Rachel Harrison or Stephen Graham Jones. And no movie podcasts, either. I don't want to think about horror books or horror movies. This isn't a vacation, but I want to take a break from that part of myself, which is the largest part of me.

I'm not nervous. More exhausted than anything else. But that's probably mostly to do with my toddler. I miss her already, and haven't done many overnight trips since she's been born.

Okay. Maybe I'm nervous.

I shouldn't have packed that Blu-ray. What an amateur move. A lifelong dream realized and I arrive… autograph seeking?

I'm flying into Winnipeg to visit the set of *Clown in a Cornfield*, directed by Eli Craig (*Tucker and Dale vs. Evil*), based on my novel of the same name. The book was published by HarperTeen in 2020, won a Bram Stoker Award that year, and producers Temple Hill Entertainment (*Smile*, *The Hate U Give*) have been developing a movie version since the book was in galleys.

Any author will tell you: film interest is cool – be it an option, a shopping agreement, or a spirited phone call with Hollywood – but don't get your hopes up. "Developing" a movie and making a movie are two very different things.

But by the time I land in Winnipeg, the crew of *Clown in a Cornfield* has been filming for three days.

It's fucking happening, I think. *Really happening*. Then I remind myself that just because a movie gets made doesn't mean it gets released. Right, David Zaslav? But even that

PROP MASTER ALEXIS LABRA (LEFT) TESTS OUT HIS WARES ON THE AUTHOR.

intrusive doomer thought can't temper my enthusiasm… or my anxiety.

I grab my rental car, check in to the hotel, and wonder what I should do for the rest of the evening.

Google Maps says there's a chain bookstore a few minutes away. Do stores in Canada even stock my books? Time to find out.

In the parking lot, I do the embarrassing thing I do in front of every bookstore. I put my camera on selfie mode, film myself pointing at the store's sign, then steal quick POV shots walking the shelves, finding my books, and autographing them.

How these videos are edited, it can seem like I'm "going rogue" and signing books without asking, but I always let the booksellers know what I'm doing.

Today's booksellers are very friendly, but I don't tell them why I'm in town, that this book's going to be "A Major Motion Picture." I almost do, but then I feel weird and don't.

The next morning, I drive to set with producer Petersen Harris. Pete's great. I'm thankful he's flown in from LA to accompany me on this visit, introduce me to folks. It's a 45-minute drive from Winnipeg to Kettle Springs, Missouri.

No. Not really. Kettle Springs is the fictional town from my books (there are three *Clown in a Cornfield* novels, and to write this article I'm stealing time from drafting the fourth). But the production has taken over four blocks of Selkirk, Manitoba, and transformed them into Kettle Springs.

I've been on movie sets before, but those have typically been the "Hey, we have a bowling alley that's going to be demolished next month. Can you write a movie that takes place entirely in a bowling alley? Also: money's tight" variety.

This is… different.

This is a parade. Dozens and dozens of extras. A marching band. Firetrucks. A juggler riding a unicycle. A vintage VW Beetle fitted with a clown nose. A pick-up truck pulling an oversized ear of corn.

And towering over it all: an enormous effigy of Frendo the Clown.

Porkpie hat, Depression-era makeup, wide toothy smile. Scary stuff, even as a parade float.

"Here he is!" Eli Craig yells. The director's probably the busiest person in Manitoba, but he stops what he's doing to focus on me.

We talk for a few minutes, and as we do, he works, never making me feel like I'm a bother or that his attention's straying from the film.

I watch as he answers questions, different department heads presenting him with issues and possible solutions.

I've never strung together 15 minutes where I've been this decisive, and it seems like this dude spends his entire life in this zone. He tells me later that he used to be a mountaineer, a guy in charge of bringing groups up and down *mountains*, making sure they didn't die. That makes sense.

The production is gearing up for the next shot and, while it does, Eli takes a moment to walk the parade route with me, sharing some of his philosophy.

He likes horror movies that keep a tiny seed of optimism, no matter how dark they get. So do I. He likes to mix horror and humor and, while his adaptation has a few more laughs than my book does, I agree. He loves the characters in *Clown in a Cornfield* and also loves when horrible, bloody slasher things happen to them. Ding ding ding, we're on the same page.

While we talk, I marvel at little details on Main Street. The Missouri license plates on every car, flyers for different community events taped to lamp poles, the way the newspaper boxes have been switched over to the Missouri Daily Register, the stenciling and decals on the fire trucks and police cars. Kettle Springs, in real life.

All details that will be glimpsed for seconds in the final film, maybe never on screen at all. It's the work of a lot of craftspeople, working under production designer Brian Kane, to whom Eli introduces me.

There's even a defunct movie theater on the parade route, the marquee rusted and decayed. It feels too perfect since the Eureka, the movie theater in the books, is a fairly important location later in the series. I ask if they deliberately scouted a street with a movie theater.

No. It's a happy accident.

Someone – the first AD I think – calls for Eli on his walkie-talkie.

They're ready.

"Okay. Let's get Adam in on this," Eli says. "Here, zip up your hoodie to hide any logos on your shirt. Let's put you… here."

KEVIN DURAND (MAYOR ARTHUR HILL, LEFT) AND AUTHOR ADAM CESARE.

He sits me on a steel bleacher to watch the parade. I'm surrounded by nice older Canadian ladies. One of them hands me a miniature American flag. "That's the director, right? Why did he put you here?"

I'm not sure what I'm supposed to say, so I go with the truth. "I wrote the book the movie's based on."

Boy, do my new friends get a kick out of that. They're excited for me, complimentary. It's nice, to feel their glow. I should have told the booksellers about the movie, basked in a little more of this.

"What's the book about? We work on a lot of the movies that shoot in this area," she indicates the woman on the other side of me. "Both of us were on *The Christmas Cookie Caper* for Hallmark. Did you see that one?"

I... oh god.

"TOWERING OVER IT ALL: AN ENORMOUS EFFIGY OF FRENDO THE CLOWN. PORKPIE HAT, DEPRESSION-ERA MAKEUP, WIDE TOOTHY SMILE. SCARY STUFF, EVEN AS A PARADE FLOAT."

My new friends haven't even been told what *genre* of movie they're in. Do I tell them that there are significantly more head-crushings and chainsaw murders in this than there are in your average episode of *When Calls the Heart*?

Luckily, our attention is drawn elsewhere, and I don't have to answer. We're instructed that, on the first take, we have to cheer. Then on the second take we have to do the same thing, but silently, because they'll be rolling sound on the actors.

In the scene we're townspeople watching Kettle Springs Mayor Arthur Hill (Kevin Durand, *Abigail*, *Kingdom of the Planet of the Apes*) deliver a rousing stump speech about preserving small town American values.

It's a speech that I'm... unfamiliar with.

In the book the Mayor and Arthur Hill are two different characters. But in Carter Blanchard and Eli Craig's script, they've been combined.

It's a change that makes a lot of sense, streamlines both the storytelling and themes. But listening to this speech, it hits me: Oh yeah. This is Kettle Springs, but it isn't *my* Kettle Springs.

It's not a record scratch moment. I'm not offended that Eli's changing things from the book. But it is a moment of realization, of odd déjà vu doubling. Some Stephen King *Dark Tower* alternate universes shit.

It's pretty cool, that there are now two Kettle Springs, where (slightly) different things happen. Who knows, maybe there's another Kettle Springs

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ADAM CESARE AND PETE HARRIS

DIRECTOR ELI CRAIG (LEFT) AND CESARE, STANDING IN THE SHADOW OF FRENDO.

where a killer in a clown mask never goes on a rampage. That wouldn't make for a very interesting book or movie, but at least some of my favorite characters would still be alive.

The nice Canadian background actors and I cheer and laugh. Then we *mime* cheering and laughing (harder than it sounds). Eli yells cut and, like that, my acting career is over.

After that Eli gets busy preparing for the next shot, Pete's engaged in a conversation with producer John Fischer, so I'm left to myself. I stray from my chair in video village and explore the set on my own.

The first time I see Katie Douglas, our star, she's filming the parade with a MiniDV camcorder. It immediately endears her to me. Dare I say it's something her character, Quinn Maybrook, would do. And I should know, because I've been living with Quinn for a good six or seven years now, and hopefully will be for the rest of my life, God willing, if the laws of slasher sequels and reboots (and book sales) hold out.

Katie is then joined by Carson MacCormac, and then Verity Marks and Cassandra Potenza. They're the kids of Kettle Springs: Quinn, Cole, Ronnie, and Janet. Even missing Rust (Vincent Muller), Tucker (Ayo Solanke), and Matt (Alexandre Martin Deakin), the scene is uncanny.

It's the kids, I think, *my kids*.

Which is a strange thing for a grown man to think, standing on a street corner, spying on a group of young people he's never met.

So I move on in search of someone else to talk to.

I find Aaron Abrams (*Hannibal*), who plays Glenn Maybrook, Quinn's dad. We talk about our favorite horror movies. Guy's got good taste. I ask the props department if they have any fake knives to stab me in the neck with. They do. Wardrobe lets me see Frendo's mask. No, I cannot try it on. Kevin Durand tells me several showbiz anecdotes that can't possibly be true, but I fact-check them later, and they are. I do not ask him what it was like working with David Cronenberg, which takes a lot of restraint on my part. I ask several people if they think the film will be rated R. This isn't a given, as the books are technically young adult titles. But (fictional) violence is very important to me and I want to make sure there's gore. There is.

I watch the parade reset itself, all the vehicles put in reverse and rolling back to their starting positions. Then I see him.

Will Sasso, playing Sheriff Dunne.

He's going to pass right by me.

I could flag him down, say hi before he gets back in this police cruiser to ride in the parade.

But, eh, I can get someone to introduce me after lunch. It'd probably be fine to attempt small talk now, tell him I'm a fan. But if I did, I'd keep thinking about how I've got a copy of *Southland Tales*, and a black Sharpie, in the rental car.

And… and…

And, I've only been in Canada for 24 hours, but I don't feel like a fan anymore. Or, I should say: I don't want to present myself on this movie set, in Kettle Springs, as a fanboy.

Who knows if that was the right decision, because over the last few months I keep looking at that Blu-ray and thinking "man, should have asked."

Oh well. Maybe at the premiere.

Clown in a Cornfield is in theaters May 9th, from RLJE Films and Shudder.

PHOTO BY KRISTY CARLOW

"[DIRECTOR ELI CRAIG] LOVES THE CHARACTERS IN *CLOWN IN A CORNFIELD* AND ALSO LOVES WHEN HORRIBLE, BLOODY SLASHER THINGS HAPPEN TO THEM… WE'RE ON THE SAME PAGE."

CRAIG AND CESARE WATCH THE PARADE ROLL DOWN MAIN STREET IN THE FICTIONAL KETTLE SPRINGS, MISSOURI.

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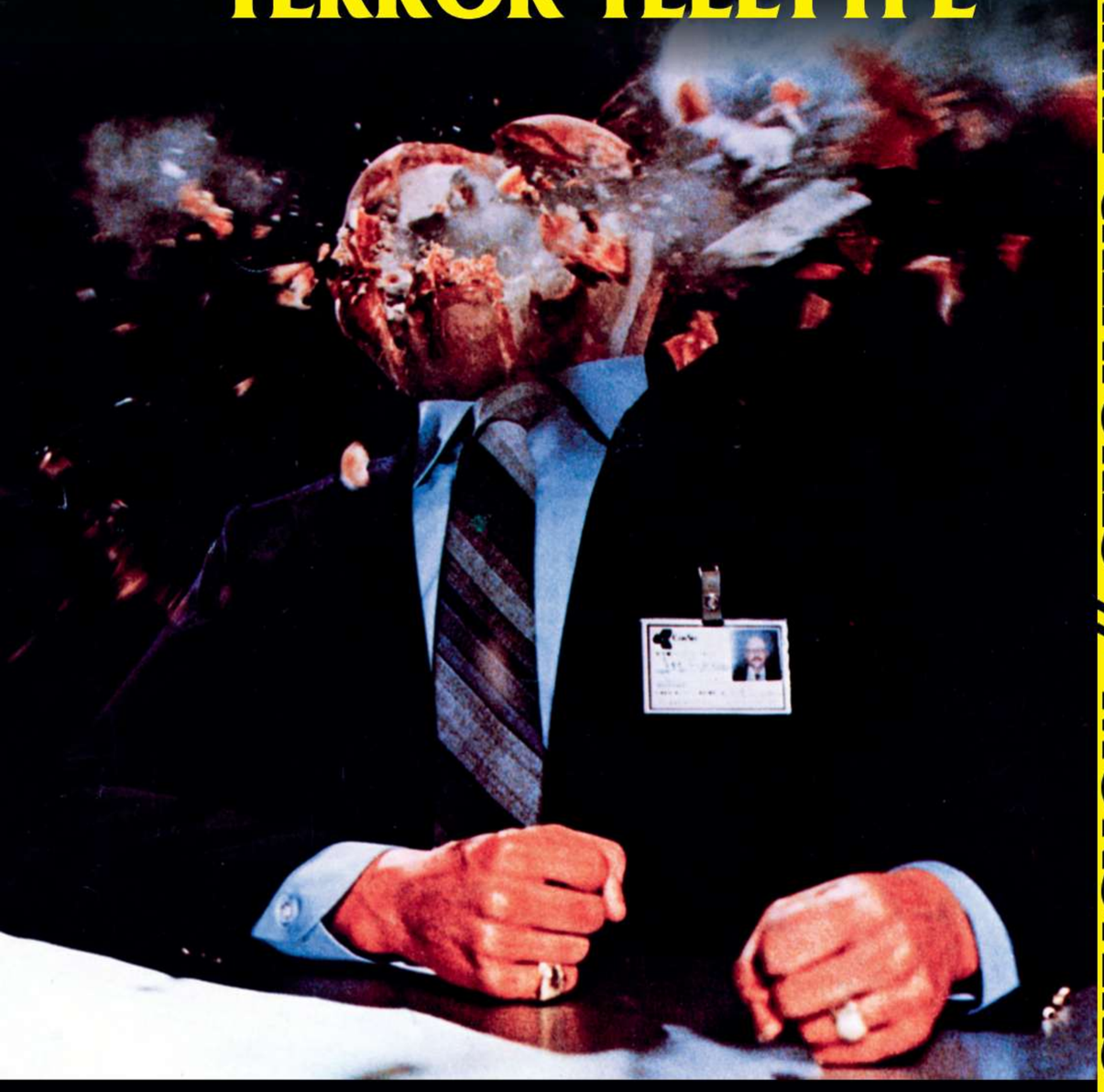

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DAVID F. SANDBERG AND GARY DAUBERMAN ARE NOT PLAYING AROUND WITH

UNTIL DAWN

BY BRETT GALLMAN

L-R: ODESSA A'ZION (NINA), BELMONT CAMELI (ABE), ELLA RUBIN (CLOVER), MICHAEL CIMINO (MAX) AND JI-YOUNG YOO (MEGAN) PLAY THE GAME.

Tackling *Until Dawn* poses a unique challenge even by the already tricky standards of video game adaptations. Not only does Sony's horror hit hinge on unique gameplay mechanics that lead to various narrative twists and turns based on the player's choices, but it's also already lauded for its cinematic quality, a combination resulting in quite a conundrum. How do you tell a familiar story that inherently relies on the element of surprise, all while remaining true to the source material? For director and producer David F. Sandberg and producer and writer Gary Dauberman – who count themselves among the game's legion of fans – this challenge was part of the appeal to bringing this universe to the screen.

"I was very familiar with the game," Sandberg reveals. "I love it – I think it's the most cinematic game I've ever played." As such, he was adamant about not simply translating the existing experience to the big screen; instead, he and Dauberman have cleverly crafted what they're calling a "continuation" of *Until Dawn* that provides a fresh experience for seasoned fans and newcomers alike. Praising Dauberman and co-writer Blair Butler's script, the director describes the thrill of discovering an inventive approach. "That's one of the reasons I thought the script was really exciting," he raves. "It didn't just try to condense a ten-hour game into two hours and simply remove the interactivity."

While the audience won't be able to influence the film's story, Dauberman replicates the film's signature structure with the introduction of a time loop that forces the characters to continually relive the worst night of their lives as they encounter a host of different horrors in and around a remote house. This hook in particular sparked Sandberg's imagination, because it captures the eclectic spirit

MAX HAS THE UNLUCKY TASK OF FACING OFF WITH THE APTLY NAMED PSYCHO (TIBOR SZAUERVEIN, LEFT).

PHOTOS BY KERRY BROWN, COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT

of the original game. "The great thing about the game is that it dabbles in different horror genres," he explains. "You have the slasher element, you have the creature element, and the fun thing is that you can play it over and over again. What the script did so brilliantly was retain that: it starts over, and you're in a new horror genre."

For Dauberman, the time loop concept was key in capturing the sensation of playing the game for the first time. "The more traditional, old-school way of playing video games is you die and you learn from your mistakes," he says. "But we treated this as more of an open-world game where each night feels new and fresh, and every decision carries a lot of weight. We wanted to keep the surprises going throughout the movie." Their ability to unleash a different set of horrors with each reset conjures up images of Sandberg and Dauberman at the helm of a whiteboard straight out of *Cabin in the Woods*, and the duo admits it was a thrill exploring such a twisted sandbox.

"The game plays around with the slasher, and there's some psychological stuff so I knew we needed that," Sandberg reveals. "But then there's some stuff I wanted to do on a bigger scale," he teases, no doubt an allusion to the kaiju-sized threat glimpsed in the trailer. After spending several years in the big-budget superhero realm with *Shazam*, he admits he was looking to return to the horror genre, and the kitchen sink variety of *Until Dawn* allowed him to scratch that itch in maximalist fashion. "I was very eager to come back to horror, but at the same time, I was wondering what exactly I wanted to do," he reveals. "And then when I read this script, I realized it has everything – I'll get to do all of the genres."

Dauberman echoes the director's enthusiasm, noting that the approach lent itself to experimenting with different modes of horror. "We definitely played around with some of the genres that are explored in the game," he confirms. "But we also added some of our own that we wanted to play around with ourselves, so it was a lot of fun."

In the spirit of the film's secrecy, the duo is hesitant to reveal too many details about the various subgenres. However, Sandberg divulges that one of his favorite stretches of the film

THE TIME LOOP FUNCTION OF *UNTIL DAWN* ALLOWS FOR SEVERAL HORROR SUB-GENRES IN ONE MOVIE. INCLUDING, PERHAPS, POSSESSION?

> "IT DOES GET PRETTY BLOODY AND GORY AT TIMES. THERE'S ONE PARTICULAR SEQUENCE WHERE A CHARACTER LOSES THEIR LIMBS IN A BRUTAL WAY."
>
> - David F. Sandberg

CLOVER (RUBIN) SHINES THE LIGHT ON SOME UNSEEN ATROCITY.

MEGAN (YOO) PROBABLY CAN'T WAIT FOR THIS PARTICULAR LOOP TO RESET.

ventures into body horror territory. "It does get pretty bloody and gory at times," he teases. "There's one particular sequence where a character loses their limbs in a brutal way." Coming off of the extensive digital effects work in *Shazam*, he was eager to achieve violence with old-fashioned make-up effects. "I really wanted to do it practically and take practical effects as far as we could," he insists. "I haven't done a lot of that because my previous horror movies were more supernatural, so I wanted to do this in-camera with an amputee double. I think it's my favorite part in the movie."

The mayhem isn't just confined to this sequence either. "We did a lot of crazy stuff on this movie," Sandberg promises before hinting at another familiar subgenre. "There's even a brief found footage sequence in the movie," he hints. "It was fun to do, as well, because you can get away with a lot, and you have to do it quickly and messy."

In fact, Sandberg embraced the gritty, physical nature of the production throughout and is quick to praise his young cast for being up to the challenge. "Actors can make your life hard as a filmmaker sometimes," he admits. "But this was the best experience ever because they were so into the horror." He mentions that star Maia Mitchell was especially enthusiastic about the grueling shoot. "She said it was liberating because she usually has to look pretty and perfect, but here she was bloody, sweaty, and broken down, screaming and crawling through the dirt," he says. If Sandberg's description conjures up images of Sam Raimi tormenting Bruce Campbell on the set of *The Evil Dead*, rest assured that he casually confirms the existence of "blood cannons" that blasted cast members in the face to give them a crimson mask. "They had to keep their eyes shut!" he says with a laugh. "It's not fun if it gets in there."

Audiences, however, can expect plenty of fun amidst the gore-soaked havoc. Both Sandberg and Dauberman admit that their previous efforts in the horror genre – *Lights Out*, the *Annabelle* series – capture their love of crafting thrill ride horror that's meant to excite and unnerve in equal measure. "What we bring to *Until Dawn* is that sense

PETER STORMARE'S DR. HILL IS A VITAL PART OF THE *UNTIL DAWN* VIDEO GAME; DIRECTOR DAVID F. SANDBERG DIDN'T WANT TO ADAPT THE PROPERTY WITHOUT HIM.

MAX (CIMINO) AND CLOVER (RUBIN) TRY TO SURVIVE THE LONGEST NIGHT EVER.

of fun," Sandberg confirms. "We were trying to do the scariest, most fun horror movie that we could."

Dauberman chimes in to agree, noting that he was primarily looking to recapture the experience of playing the game for the first time. "Dave and I have similar sensibilities – we both enjoy popcorn, escapist entertainment," he offers. "That joy and fun I have when playing the game is the thing I wanted to replicate the most."

The duo assures me that long-time fans will appreciate their commitment to staying true to the game's roots, something they hope is especially evident having Peter Stormare reprise his iconic role as Dr. Hill. "He was super important," Sandberg insists. "If he would have said no, or if we weren't able to get him, it's like, 'Do we even want to do it?' Because we can't just recast him."

Working with fellow Swedish countryman Stormare was also a dream come true for the director. "I'm a big fan," Sandberg says. "I actually tried to get him on *Lights Out*, but the studio said he can't play a cuddly, family guy. But now I finally got to work with him – I wrote him a nice letter in Swedish that told him I always wanted to work with him and how much he means to me."

> "WE WERE TRYING TO DO THE SCARIEST, MOST FUN HORROR MOVIE THAT WE COULD."
> - David F. Sandberg

Dauberman agrees that casting Stormare was a vital part of bringing the game's mythology to the big screen. "In order to make it feel as if it's of the world, he was important," he adds. "Hill's the face of the franchise, he's the guy behind the curtain, like the Wizard of Oz. In terms of expanding the mythology, we needed him to usher us through."

Uninitiated viewers and horror aficionados will find plenty to appreciate here, especially since the film doubles as a genre jukebox, allowing the pair to both toy with and embrace conventions. "We wanted to strike a balance between leaning into the tropes but also subverting them and doing something different," Sandberg explains. "So it doesn't feel like you've seen it before, but you know what subgenre you're watching."

Until Dawn might be the latest in the long line of horror films that have taken characters off the beaten path and put them through a grinder, but it promises to push this familiar theme to its limits, offering the current generation a new disreputable touchstone. "Remember when horror had a danger to it?" Dauberman muses. "Like you shouldn't be watching it? It's fun that this is creeping back into the genre – I find it really refreshing." 💀

BELMONT CAMELI (ABE) GETS CAUGHT UP IN A DEATH THAT MAY LOOK FAMILIAR TO FANS OF THE GAME.

INTO OUTER SPACE

WITH FLYING LOTUS'

THE FILMMAKER OPENS UP ABOUT HIS NEW SCI-FI HORROR JOURNEY.

BY ROCCO T. THOMPSON

Following his manic, scatological body-horror collage *Kuso*, record producer, DJ and rapper turned filmmaker Flying Lotus imagines the horrors of deep space in eye-popping kinetic style with his latest film, *Ash*. Working from a script by Jonni Remmler and executive produced by Neill Blomkamp, *Ash* finds Riya (Eiza González) stuck on an uninhabited planet with only the mysterious Brion (Aaron Paul) and what's left of her memory. As the film unfolds, Riya tries to piece together what happened to her and the crew of an abandoned spacecraft.

Awash in ultraviolet purples and blaring reds, *Ash* sees the multi-hyphenate upping his game with POV fight sequences and some truly nasty special effects, all in service of a classically structured sci-fi brain-bender.

FANGORIA sat down with FlyLo ahead of the film's SXSW world premiere to discuss artistic growing pains, video games, and the pleasures of discovering his galaxy far, far away in New Zealand.

ACTION STAR IKO UWAIS AS ADHI.

Ash is a bit of a departure for you after *Kuso* and your *V/H/S/99* segment. What was your major creative goal here?

When I got the script, it was so in tune with my interests that I fought for it and sacrificed a lot to get it done. My goal was to establish my own visual sensibilities and show the world that I can tell stories on a bigger level than the more experimental things that people know me for. I want to be able to play around in different spaces when the right script, the right material, calls to me.

You mention sacrifices. What was so challenging about making this film?

Everything. No part of it was easy. Even for a movie that had a bigger budget than what I was used to, all the same challenges were there with no escape. The first couple weeks of filming, we had no money. Some crew members hate your guts. I was the only Black person in New Zealand that I could see for [miles]. I wouldn't have acted in the movie if there were other Black people around. I would never do that under normal circumstances.

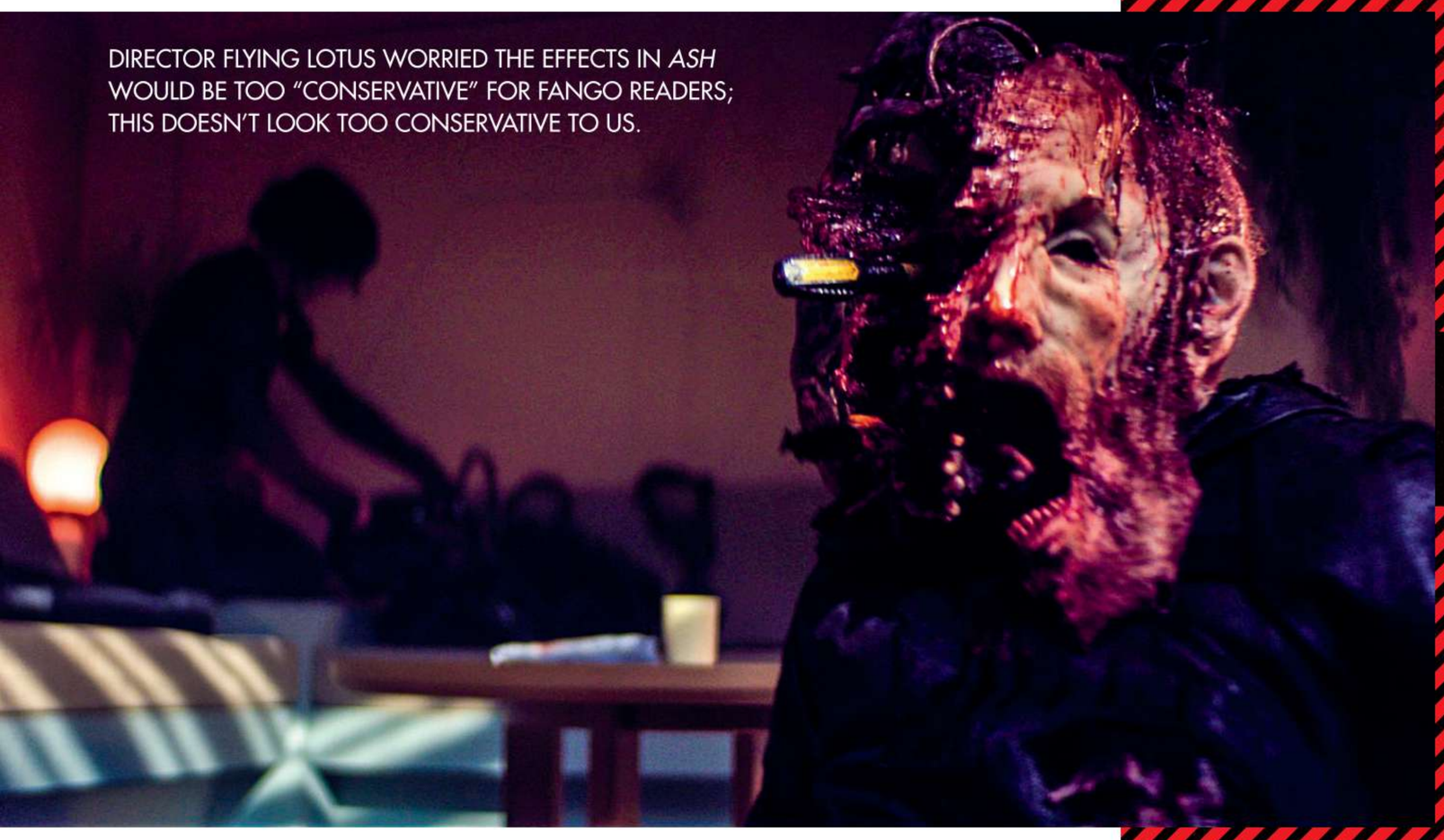
And how was that experience for you, acting on top of everything else?

I liked the challenge, [but] wouldn't recommend it. Because I'm the director, people might have been afraid to make comments on my performance, where the mic was, how my shirt was looking, all that stuff. I'm not able to look behind the monitor so I need the people around me to be able to be honest with me. If I'm ever doing double duty again, I've got to have someone who's going to be like, 'Yo, man, that shit was trash. You got to do one more, dog,' because I'm too busy being in the moment. I need that person! I can take it!

What did Aaron Paul and Eiza González bring to the table?

Eiza is like a producer: she thinks like the audience and she's very passionate about what she does. She says, 'Why am I doing this?' That can be frustrating, but when I'm in the edit all is forgiven because that ultimately gives me more options. Aaron was like the team captain. Everyone loves Aaron Paul, and he knows everyone loves Aaron Paul. He was like the glue. When he shows up, it just does so much for the energy of the entire crew and the vibe [on set].

EIZA GONZÁLEZ LEADS THE FILM AS RIYA.



DIRECTOR FLYING LOTUS WORRIED THE EFFECTS IN *ASH* WOULD BE TOO "CONSERVATIVE" FOR FANGO READERS; THIS DOESN'T LOOK TOO CONSERVATIVE TO US.

ASH IS A "SCI-FI BRAIN BENDER" AWASH IN SATURATED REDS AND PURPLES.

Ash features some pretty gnarly effects. What was your general approach here and how tough were they to accomplish?

I'll be honest with you, I was like, 'Man, talking to FANGORIA, oh God, they're going to be on my ass about effects!' I was a little conservative in *Ash* as a result of not being in my element, but I think there are some good things we did. I would push them further if I could, but we got to go off in the end. I was like, 'Yo, has anyone on the crew played *Resident Evil*?'

You know how it is with puppets: they're divas. Sometimes they want to work, sometimes they don't, and you got to make some alternative moves and changes. We were really lucky to work with some ex-Wētā Workshop people. New Zealand is a small community of filmmakers, and, because of the landscape, all the big sci-fi movies come [there], *Avatar* and all that shit. I think it was a little bit easier for us to get some things [made], but, man, I had to push them to do the dark shit because New Zealand's too beautiful. 'It's not evil enough. It's got to be more evil. Let's evilize this movie!'

Speaking of _Resident Evil_, you can really see that gamer mentality coming through, whether it's in the creature designs or POV combat scenes...

I try to not even shy away from it at this point. I feel like that's one of my advantages because a lot of people have cinematic language, they study the history of film, [but] I also got the history of gaming, [which is its own] cinematic language, too. *The Last of Us*, *Dead Space*, your *Resident Evil*s and *Silent Hill*s... all those games have weaseled into my work for sure.

How did you approach scoring this film?

I did the bulk of the work on my own, so I just had to lock in. [Being in] New Zealand, focusing on music with my laptop and no distractions, it was really fun. I got a sound that I wouldn't have made at home by just being over there and soaking up the environment, drinking kava, and hanging out with Samoan guys. It absolutely felt like I was alone on another planet.

Did you like having your fingers in so many pots?

I don't want to say no because I'll fuck around and just do exactly what I'm going to say I won't do, but I would prefer to not do as much. I think going as far as doing some of the 3D VFX in the film – doing shit in Unreal Engine, helping model the ship – I did a lot of those shots myself and remember just thinking, 'Dude, I feel like my skills are not being used properly right now,' or maybe they were, but I would prefer to not do all of that.

But I think hindsight is 20/20. There's a lot of things I would do differently now. There's a lot of things that I should have, would have, could have, but I think I did what I set out to do. I think I made the best version of the script that you could make.

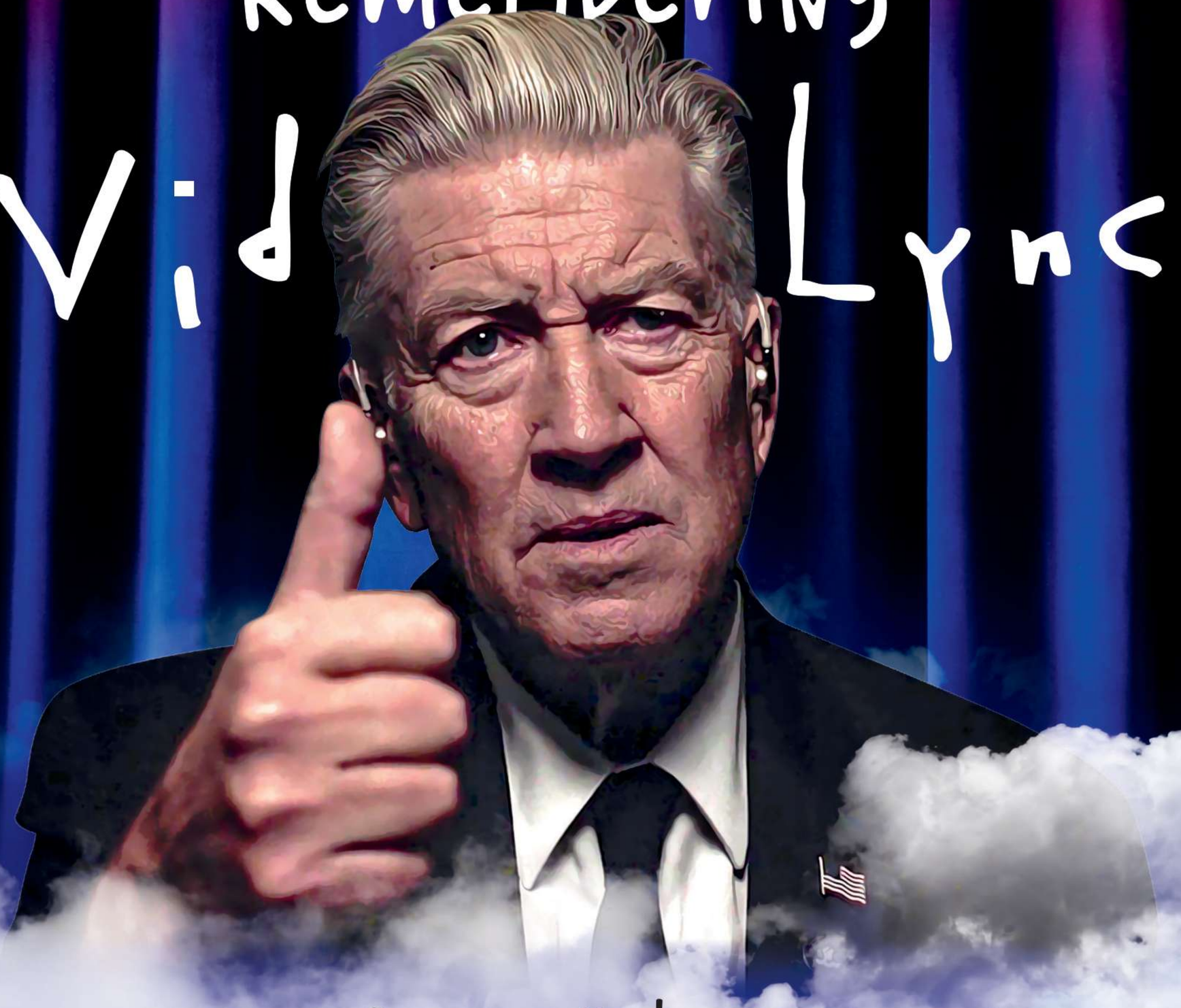
What do you hope viewers take away from _Ash_?

It would be nice if people liked it! I'm just so grateful for the opportunity to do something on this level and to have the trust of the producers and the actors and the crew. This is what I wanted when I was a kid, to make a big sci-fi movie. I got to do it, and I got to do my version of it and not do someone else's – not try to do *Alien*. I try to do my thing, and I'm proud of that. 💀

PHOTOS BY JEN RAOULT, COURTESY OF SHUDDER

By Meredith Borders

At The End of the Story: RemeMberiNg David Lynch



a farewell to our greatest visionary.

When David Lynch died on January 25th of this year, the prevailing sentiment was, "Hasn't LA suffered enough?" By the day his death was announced, Lynch's chosen home had been devastated by wildfires for over two weeks. Los Angeles loved David Lynch, and David Lynch loved Los Angeles. In *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity*, Lynch says of his first morning in LA, "I stepped out of a small apartment on San Vicente Boulevard, [and] I saw this light. And it thrilled my soul. I feel lucky to live with that light [...] It fills me with the feeling that all possibilities are available." It is a particular cruelty that the love story between LA and its favorite son would end as the city burned – but to ask for a love story without suffering is to neglect every lesson he taught us though his art.

In the work of David Lynch, the underside of love is pain. Beneath the bright blue sky and behind the prize-winning roses, there's an ear ripped from the head of a husband and father. Young lovers are stalked by a relentless string of criminals; a classic Hollywood romance is nothing more than a twisted dream; mistrust and violence seep into the cracks of a marriage. A popular teenage girl is sacrificed, her pain and sorrow nourishing our darkest spirits.

But when talking about an artist preoccupied with irreconcilable juxtapositions, it's fitting that the creator of these dark stories would himself be an inexhaustible source of light. "The filmmaker doesn't have to *be* suffering to *show* suffering," he writes in *Catching the Big Fish*. "Let your characters do the suffering." With the David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace, he promoted Transcendental Meditation as a tool for overcoming trauma, pain and chronic stress. In his mission statement for the foundation, he says, "[Meditation] has given me effortless access to unlimited reserves of energy, creativity and happiness deep within," and it was Lynch's most sacred belief that those reserves are accessible to all of us. Through his work, his words, all the way down to his weather reports, the vast generosity of David Lynch's mind and spirit demanded that he share the light within, at a time when our society is marked by the jealous hoarding of every possible resource.

But here's the thing about sharing your inner reserves: the more you give, the more you have. And no one had more than David Lynch. He was a man of boundless curiosity. We know him best for his films, but to call him a filmmaker reduces the totality of who he was: a painter, a storyteller, a photographer, an actor, a musician, a comedian, a documentarian, a philosopher, a cartoonist, a style icon, a furniture designer and carpenter. His father was a research scientist for the US Forest Service, instilling in Lynch a lifelong passion for the feel and look of lumber, imagery crucial to the worlds of both *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet*. That's only one benefit of being a student of the world, of wanting to know everything about everything: David Lynch's movies are about *everything*. His fascination with Tibet, electricity, identity, eroticism, forestry, Francis Bacon, Roy Orbison – everything from coffee to consciousness – makes its way into the texture of his art, giving his worlds a reality deeper than reality, substance bolstering the absurd.

David Foster Wallace wrote in a 1996 *Premiere* essay that the frustratingly nebulous descriptor of "Lynchian" – a term that Lynch himself famously had little use for – "refers to a particular kind of irony where the very macabre and the very mundane combine in such a way as to reveal the former's perpetual containment within the latter." It's a useful place to put our feelings about his work, but it also reveals something about Lynch's entire belief system: nothing is mundane. Our everyday world contains the sublime, the nightmarish, and everything in between. It is our responsibility as artists and as humans to truly see things for what they are, to dig beneath the surface into, as Lynch has said, "another world, and still different worlds as you dig deeper [...] There is goodness in blue skies and flowers, but another force – a wild pain and decay – accompanies everything."

There is undeniable pain in losing David Lynch, this man who never stopped seeking and sharing, who has mattered in uncountable ways to uncountable people. But maybe we can make our own Lynchian paradox of it and allow ourselves to believe that we will never lose him, that he cannot be lost. As he said in a *BBC* interview about his late, longtime friend and collaborator Angelo Badalamenti, "I believe life is a continuum, and that no one really dies; they just drop their physical body and we'll all meet again, like the song says. It's sad but it's not devastating if you think like that [...] It's a continuum, and we're all going to be fine at the end of the story." 💀

GORDON COLE (LYNCH, RIGHT) SAMPLES "MASSIVE, MASSIVE QUANTITIES" OF PIE WITH DOUBLE R DINER WAITRESS SHELLY (MÄDCHEN AMICK).

THIS IS THE GIRL

A TRIBUTE TO THE WOMEN OF DAVID LYNCH'S WORLD.

BY AMBER T

ILLUSTRATION BY RYAN CARR

David Lynch is dead, and the world feels smaller than ever before. Among the unanimous outpouring of love, tributes, anecdotes and essays shared after Lynch's death, one thing became as clear as blue skies and golden sunshine: David Lynch's works resonated profoundly, sacredly, with women.

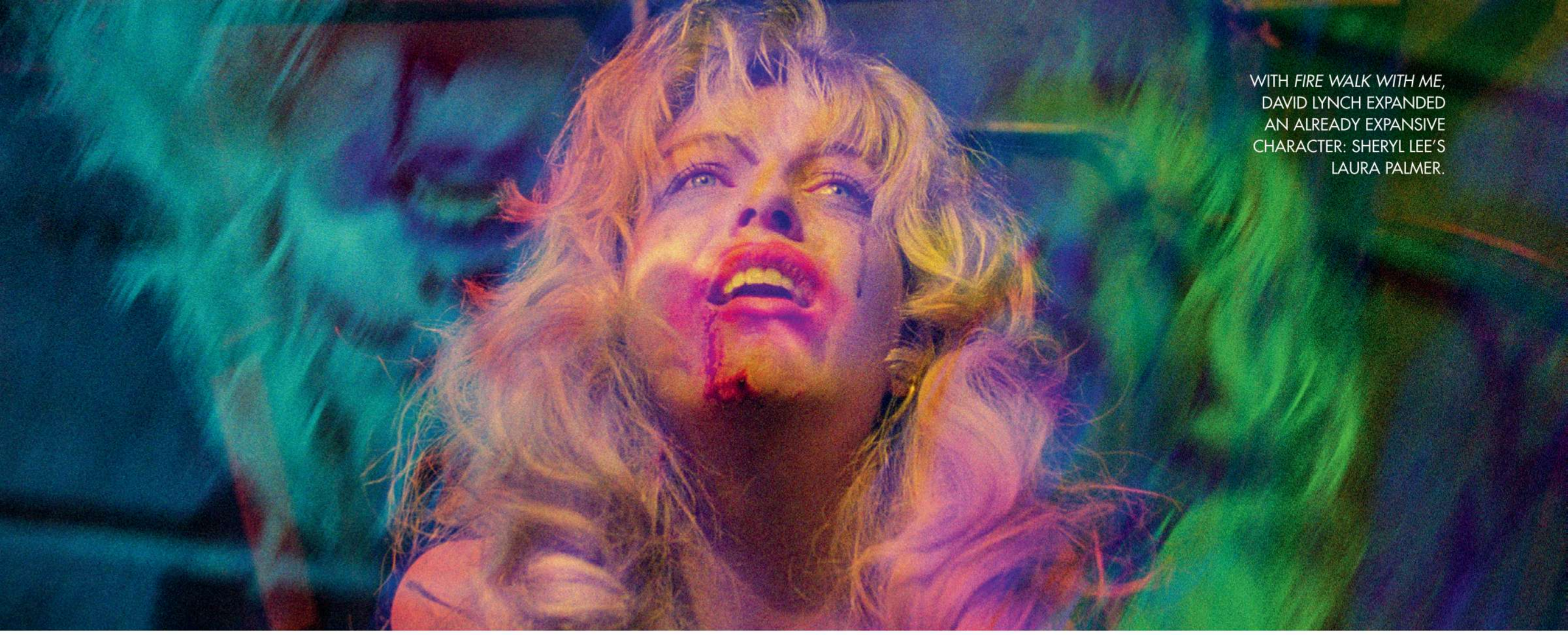
The canon of great cinema is built on a foundation of dead women, from Hitchcock's blondes to Nolan's wives. Lynch's work is no different. Many of his films feature incredibly visceral moments of violence against women that, in the hands of a lesser, less sincere director, could be seen as gratuitous. What set Lynch apart from a great deal of his contemporaries, however, was his unwavering empathy towards women, especially female victims of abuse at the hands of men. In both his biography *Room to Dream* and the 2016 documentary *David Lynch: The Art Life*, Lynch recounted a memory that stuck with him since childhood. At the tender age of just ten, he and his brother were approached in the street by a naked, beaten woman, bleeding from her mouth. Although too young to fully process what he was witnessing, Lynch was nevertheless deeply affected by the scene and the "traumatized, but beautiful" woman.

One only has to briefly scan through some of his most famous celluloid images – a dazed and naked Dorothy Vallens approaching Jeffrey on the porch, Ronette Pulaski wandering dead-eyed down the Twin Peaks train tracks – to see how the moment stuck with him. Exploring Lynch's filmography leads to the sobering realization that women exist in a state of perpetual danger, and all it takes is one violent man – one Leo Johnson, one Leland Palmer, one Frank Booth, one Phantom – to snap, strangle or shoot, and end a woman's story in red-misted rage.

People often say Lynch's films are hard to understand, but when it comes to women, his stories couldn't be simpler. The psychosexual nightmare of *Blue Velvet* picks apart, with unflinching abandon, the Madonna-whore complex, and men's voyeuristic consumption of the female body and their perceived entitlement to it. In 1997's *Lost Highway*, the bleeding, blurring boundary between violence and sex in cinema is explored through snuff film and pornography, as one man's obsessive fear and fantasies of the same woman lead him to commit an act of unspeakable violence against her. Four years later in *Mulholland Drive*, Diane's desperate suicide marks a culmination of heartbreak exacerbated by Hollywood's relentless consumption of young women. And in Lynch's final feature *Inland Empire*, simply taglined "a woman in trouble," Laura Dern's Nikki Grace is subject to the splintered fragmentation of her reality as a woman doomed to play just that: a woman, shouldering the burden of endless cycles and lifetimes of female pain.

Among Lynch's roster of fully-fleshed female characters, one stands shining bright above the rest: the blonde, beaming homecoming queen of *Twin Peaks*, Laura Palmer. Lynch loved Laura Palmer with such ferocity that her character was given life beyond her portrait. In his 2019 masterclass on creativity and film, the director recalls how star Sheryl Lee was originally hired just to play the dead girl wrapped in plastic. But upon

"TALK TO ME." NAOMI WATTS IN *MULHOLLAND DRIVE.*



WITH *FIRE WALK WITH ME*, DAVID LYNCH EXPANDED AN ALREADY EXPANSIVE CHARACTER: SHERYL LEE'S LAURA PALMER.

watching Lee perform as "absolutely perfect Laura Palmer, alive," one thing led to another – and she lived on.

Lynch treated Laura Palmer with a sensitivity and understanding rarely granted to CSA victims, whose stories are often exploited for shock value, sensationalized or fetishized. *Twin Peaks*, and especially *The Return*, frequently asks us to confront the manner in which women's pain is consumed as entertainment, holding a mirror up to us, the gawking audience, and demanding we examine that perverse nature harbored within. In the heartbreaking ending of *Fire Walk With Me*, Laura smiles with tears in her eyes as she reunites with the angel she thought had left her, lit by the blue light of a screen as she realizes her death has become entertainment for the masses. Lynch's women are continually conscious of consuming their own image, made evident by the various scenes of women performing for men, either literally or abstractly, peppered throughout his work.

Laura is a victim, yes, but she's never *just* a victim. She's a smart, funny, kind young woman with a hedonistic dark side. She writes poetry in her secret diary. She loved her cat, Jupiter, and her pony, Troy. She's fiercely protective of her best friend Donna. In Chris Rodley's *Lynch on Lynch*, the director states in no uncertain terms that "I was in love with the character of Laura Palmer and her contradictions: radiant on the surface but dying inside. I wanted to see her live, move and talk." Laura Palmer, as they say, contains multitudes.

Although panned upon release, *Fire Walk With Me* has since been reevaluated and reclaimed by women, especially women who have suffered a history of abuse, for demonstrating the complexities of Laura's character. *Fire Walk With Me* reminds us that trauma is messy, that victims don't always act the way we expect or want them to. Laura's loose attitudes towards sex and drugs may act in part as a coping mechanism for her pain, but her love of the party also serves as a necessary reminder that women do not have to play the role of perfect beacons of moral purity to be believed, or to earn your respect or support. Laura cries in the Roadhouse, sure, but she also dances.

Outside of his work, Lynch not only talked the talk, but he walked the walk. His commitment to supporting female victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, incest and human trafficking manifested in the creation of an entire subdivision of his charity, The David Lynch Foundation, dedicated to using the practice of Transcendental Meditation to support at-risk and vulnerable populations. Although his films presented the world as a scary place for women, his sets were anything but. Just ask his muses, Laura Dern, Naomi Watts and Sheryl Lee, frequent female collaborators like Grace Zabriskie and Sherilyn Fenn or his behind-the-scenes regulars like producer Sabrina S. Sutherland or his filmmaker daughter Jennifer Lynch, and you'll hear anecdote upon anecdote (Courtenay Stallings' wonderful book *Laura's Ghost: Women Speak About Twin Peaks* contains a number of them) describing a gentle, kind man who frequently saw something in his stars that they themselves weren't even aware they could access.

In her heartbreaking obituary and love letter to Lynch, Dern describes a particularly poignant moment during the filming of *The Return*, in a scene where her character Diane is about to face a traumatic reality: "What struck me with such awe, as I sat, cigarette in hand, was how much you cared about Diane's journey – how much you loved her and were willing to stay with her. I expected you to cut straight to the hotel room, but no. 'We will be with you every step of the way,' you whispered." From Diane to Laura, Lynch fire walked with all his women, forcing us through their same ordeals with unflinching abandon, refusing to look away for even a moment, from the soaring highs to the ugly, violent lows.

A lot of ideas have been thrown around on how best to honor David Lynch. Take up a daily practice of his beloved Transcendental Meditation. Commit yourself to loving so-called "weird" art. Refuse to expect answers you aren't entitled to. Fix your hearts or die. But perhaps the most tangible way to respect the man who changed so many of us is to support the women in your life, as their rights are continually threatened. Defend them in the face of a worldwide rise in violence against women. Walk with them through the fire of misogyny and transphobia, and don't let David's lost girls suffer in vain. Do it for Ronette. For Dorothy. For Denise. For Maddy. For Renee. For Diane. For Nikki. For Teresa. For Laura. 💀

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BROKEN LINES AND BROKEN MIRRORS:

DUELING THE DOPPELGÄNGER IN

LOST HIGHWAY

BY RICHARD NEWBY

A HISTORY OF THE DOUBLE THROUGHOUT POPULAR MEDIA, IN (APPROPRIATELY) TWO PARTS.

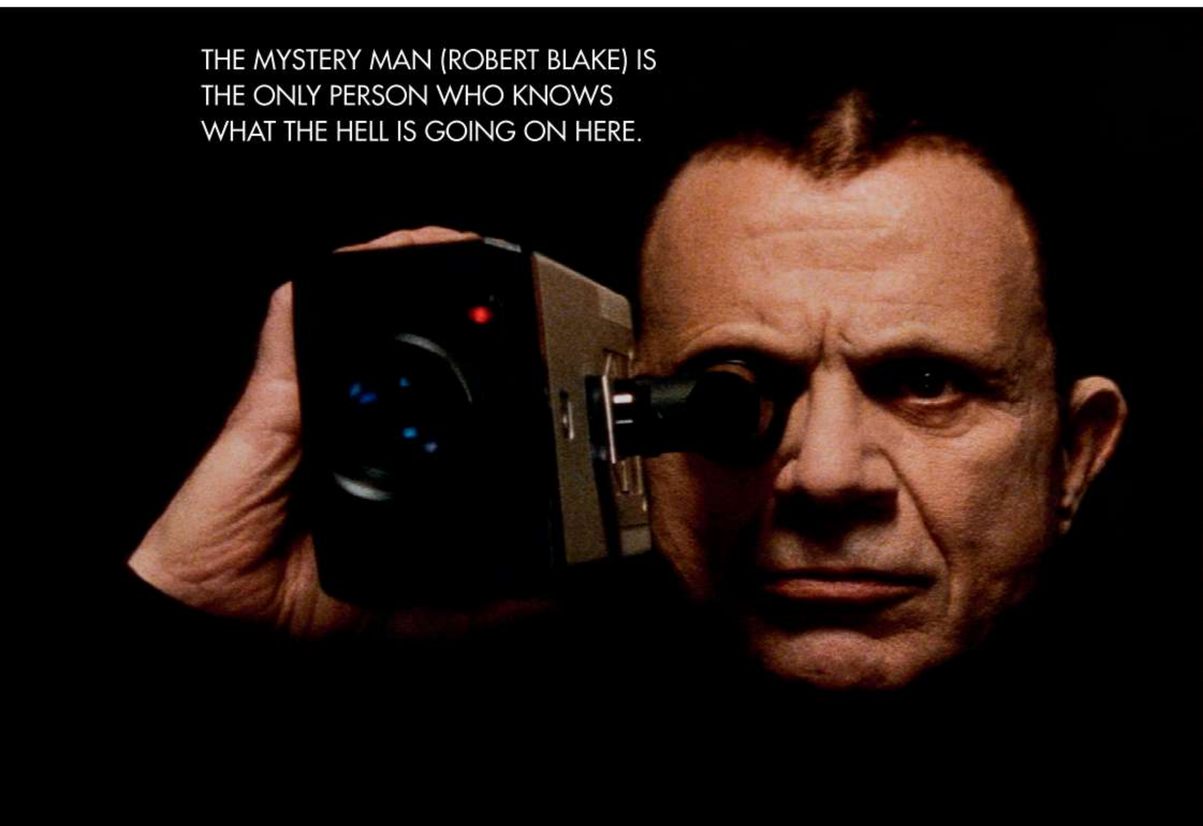
When I was 11, I went to an outlet mall with my parents, the kind of mundane Midwestern tradition that held nothing outside the expectation of normalcy and comfort. And for most of the day, that was true. But then I saw something I've never been able to shake. Walking down the opposite side of the sidewalk was a boy who looked just like me – the only difference being a prominent birthmark on the side of his face. I saw him, but he didn't see me. I remember being so startled by the incident that my heart caught in my throat and I stumbled off the sidewalk, into the street, turning my ankle. It was an injury so slight that it could barely be called an injury at all, but that feeling of panic remained. In the 23 years since, that moment has remained with me, a splinter I can never remove entirely. I wonder what that boy, presumably now an adult, is doing now. I wonder what would have happened if he'd seen me as I'd seen him. Would a much graver injury than a stumble off the curb have been in store? But most often I wonder about the reliability of that memory, if he truly did look so uncannily like me, or if it was just the magical thinking of an 11-year-old boy. Whatever the answer, I've been drawn to the concept of doppelgängers ever since.

LOST HIGHWAY CONTINUES LYNCH'S PREOCCUPATION WITH THE TELEPHONE. PICTURED: BILL PULLMAN AS FRED MADISON.

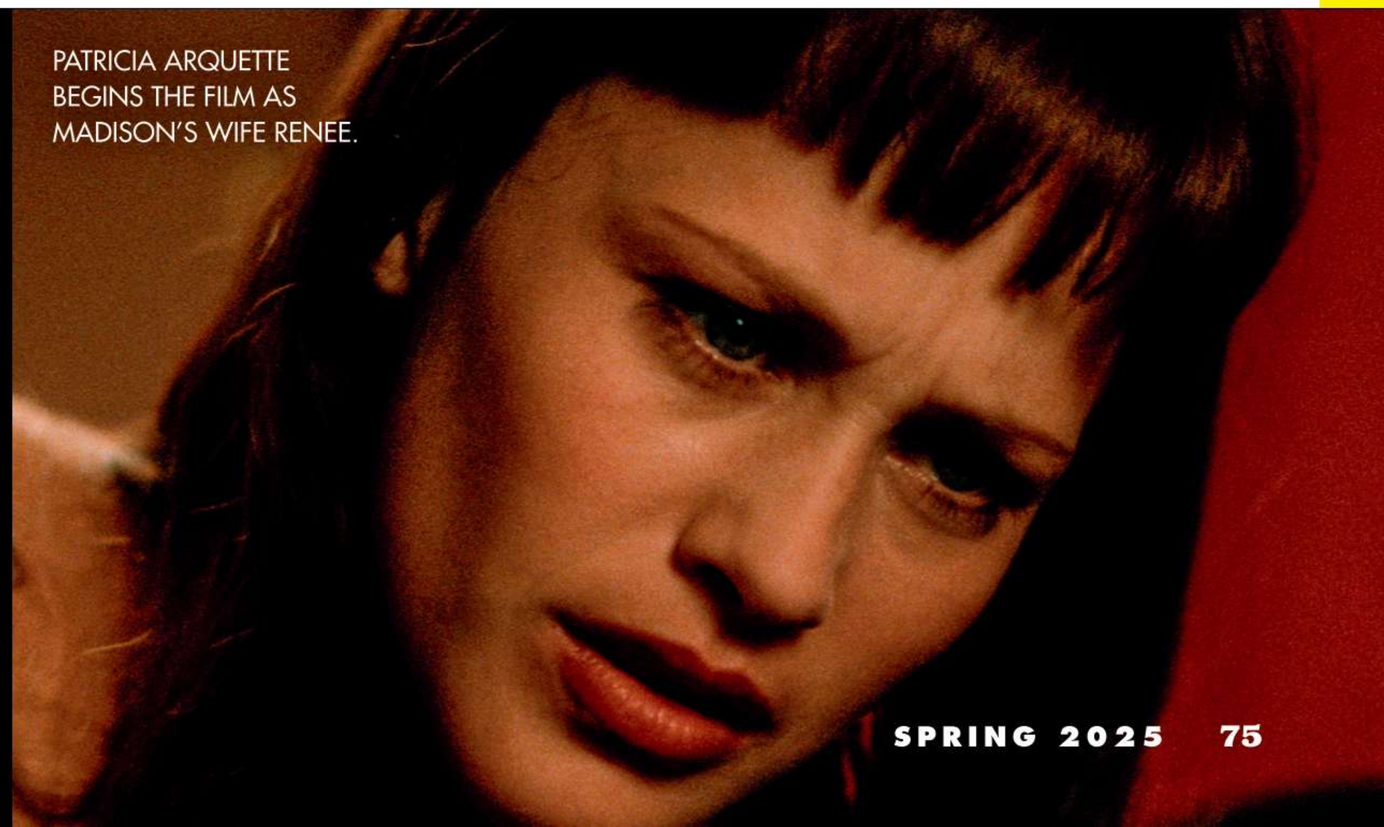
Doppelgängers and doubles have long been a part of our storytelling tradition, our means to grapple with tragedy, fate, and ourselves. The word doppelgänger, literally meaning "double goer," is only a relatively recent addition to our lexicon, first appearing in Germany in the 1800s. But accounts and stories of people encountering their "other" or "shadow self" stretch as far back as ancient Egypt and Greece, though seeing one was not necessarily a bad omen. Native American tribes, like the Hopi, had their own stories of doubles, signifying the divide between the Upper World and the Under World where actions and events would play out oppositely.

Over time these stories and accounts, blended with those of European colonizers, traveled across nascent America and later became popularized by writers like Edgar Allen Poe, whose short story "William Wilson" proved to be the foundation of many of the doubles stories that followed. In Poe's story, William Wilson, having been tormented by his doppelgänger his entire life, decides to end it, drawing his sword and challenging the double to a duel. But the doppelgänger Wilson sees is only his own mirrored reflection and the deadly wound inflicted on the doppelgänger is in fact a deadly wound Wilson inflicted upon himself. As he dies, William Wilson utters his last words, "In me didst thou exist – and in my death, see… how utterly thou hast murdered myself," revealing to himself the truth he had hidden away. He had been both the tormented and the tormenter whose disgust in the memories of his own misdeeds left his life in shambles once confronted.

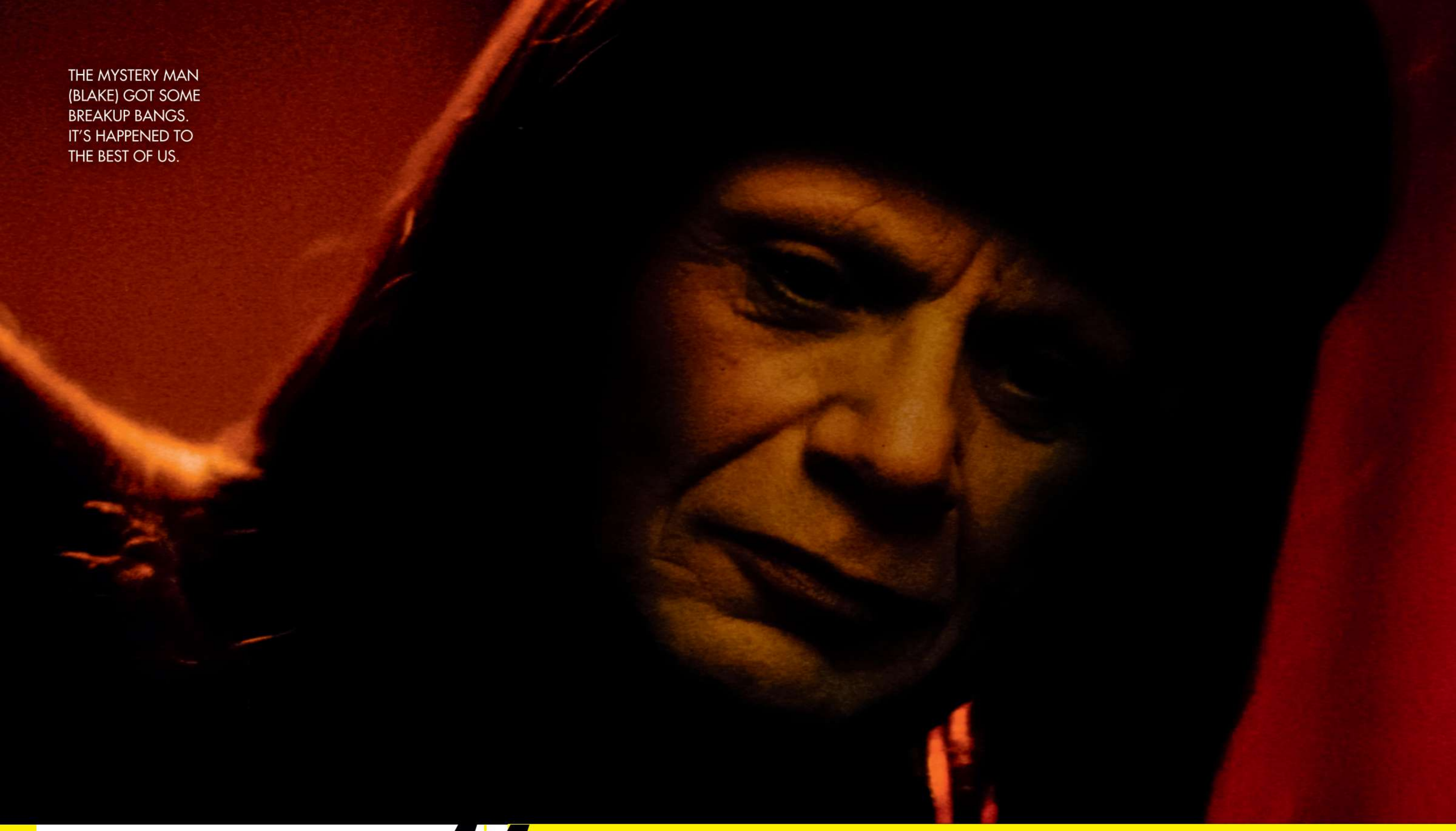
In terms of American media in the 20th and 21st centuries, the doppelgänger has traditionally been looked at along the lines of good and evil. There is something perpetually appealing about the idea of the evil twin, someone who looks like you but is entirely the opposite, the antithesis to what must be your intrinsic goodness because certainly, it couldn't be the other way around. Could it? So, we consume narratives like *Sisters*, *The Other*, *Basket Case*, *Blood Rage*, and Stephen King's



THE MYSTERY MAN (ROBERT BLAKE) IS THE ONLY PERSON WHO KNOWS WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE.



PATRICIA ARQUETTE BEGINS THE FILM AS MADISON'S WIFE RENEE.



novel *The Dark Half* along with its subsequent adaptation in 1993, which inspired, along with other works, the recent award-winning video game *Alan Wake II*. Both the supernatural and the natural become so much easier to process when the blame for the way things are can be placed at the feet of another, someone who deserves to be punished.

Yet, there exist films that take a different approach, avoiding binary morality entirely. In these films, there is no objective good or evil – there are only the twin considerations of memory/identity and sex/death. And paramount to that exploration is the work of David Lynch, who returns to the themes of doubling, duality and split personalities again and again. This is especially true of the nightmare puzzle *Lost Highway*, which presents a complex take on doubles that feels so dangerous, so violent in its invitation for the viewer to peel back the layers, that it's impossible to resist taking a journey farther down that road.

In *Lost Highway*, Fred Madison (Bill Pullman), a jazz musician on death row for the alleged dismemberment of his wife Renee (Patricia Arquette), is transformed in his cell through a gruesome display of body horror. Fred's replacement is Pete Dayton (Balthazar Getty), a young mechanic with ties to a gangster, Mr. Eddy/ Dick Laurent (Robert Loggia). Pete falls for Mr. Eddy's girlfriend, Alice Wakefield (Arquette), the spitting image of Renee, only blonde. So, what's the reality? Has Fred created Pete to give some justification for the murder of his wife? Fred's jealous tendencies are apparent early in the film: first, after he expresses loaded interest in her decision to stay home and read rather than go see his exceptionally sweaty sax performance, which given Fred's exertion feels very much like a sex performance, undoubtedly a deliberate choice on Lynch's part. And secondly, Fred is suspicious of the affections Renee offers a possible former lover,

"I LIKE TO REMEMBER THINGS MY OWN WAY. IT'S HOW I REMEMBER THEM. NOT EXACTLY THE WAY THEY HAPPENED."

- FRED MADISON

IN HIS CELL, FRED WISHES HIS OWN EXISTENCE AWAY...

Andy (Michael Massee), at a party he's hosting. Perhaps the only way Fred can cope with his own homicidal jealousy is to take the mundanity of an all-too-common act of domestic murder and turn it into a Hollywood spectacle, complete with gangsters, underground porn productions, and a blonde femme fatale whose betrayal gives him a seeming justification to kill.

"I like to remember things my own way. It's how I remember them. Not exactly the way they happened," says Fred near the beginning of the film. Film scholars have suggested Fred's replacement with Pete is the result of a psychogenic fugue state, a type of amnesia that causes a person to forget their identity, sometimes form an entirely new one, and lose their sense of time. Violent crimes, suicide attempts and car accidents have all been recorded by medical professionals as possible causes for this state.

This all fits within *Lost Highway*'s complex narrative construction, as time becomes disjointed and past and present are tangled, resulting in the film looping back on itself, the ending leading to the inciting incident. The only one who seems to understand the structure of this timeline is the chilling Mystery Man (Robert Blake), who knows Fred before they meet at Andy's party, can exist in two spaces at once, and carries a film camera, perhaps the only objective source of truth as those around him become caught up in the subjectivity of their memories. The Mystery Man's role suggests we should fear the truth, that confronting it is an act of self-harm, particularly as he chases Fred with it near the end of the film, a last chance to confront the objective world he runs from.

…AND TRANSFORMS INTO BALTHAZAR GETTY (PETE).

As Fred begins to seep back into Pete's personality, exhibited by Pete's growing jealousy and resentment over Alice and his murder of a scuzzier version of Renee's friend Andy, the emotional possession Fred has over Pete becomes a physical one in the final act of the film. Alice taunts Pete, diminishing his masculinity, which leads to Fred physically replacing Pete. Surprisingly, it's not Alice whom Fred murders, but Mr. Eddy, the man behind her betrayal and whose death sets off the beginning of the film with the first words Fred hears, words we come to find out are spoken by Fred to this past version of himself: "Dick Laurent is dead."

Yet, even Eddy/Laurent's death cannot rid Fred of his suspicions that his wife has been unfaithful, creating a cyclical pattern in which Fred murders his wife and creates a double, either intentionally or as a result of a psychogenic fugue. Fred cannot absolve himself by trying to keep Pete separate from him. They are the same, and as Fred speeds down the highway at the end of the film, his face once again swelling and bubbling as Pete tries to emerge, it's clear that neither of them can create an unbroken divide to keep one identity from the other, and so they must run from the truth.

The truth of *Lost Highway*, or rather *a* truth, is revealed by the opening and closing credits. Both are from the perspective of an unseen car, speeding along

WE'D KNOW THOSE LIPS ANYWHERE. THAT'S DEFINITELY RENEE. OR… ALICE?

IN PETE'S WORLD, PATRICIA ARQUETTE IS A BLONDE TEMPTRESS NAMED ALICE.

the broken yellow lines of the highway – an incomplete divider, a pass allowing travel from one lane to another. But the suggestion of separation by those broken yellow dashes cannot keep the car from riding the line, existing in two lanes. When you get right down to it, that's what *Lost Highway* is about: a single entity existing in two spaces at once, trying helplessly to illuminate the dark.

There is another element of *Lost Highway* worth noting. At Andy's party, there is a quick shot of Fred's hand and the tattoo on the side of it, an arch with a dot beneath. It is the musical note called the fermata, which symbolizes an uninterrupted hold of either a musical note or a moment of silence that lasts well beyond its denoted value, transforming the rhythm. This could be looked at through the lens of the duration of Fred's sax solo, how long Fred hangs onto his identity as Pete, well past the point of Pete's existence being beneficial to freeing himself from the loop he's caught in. But further, musically the fermata acts as an unbroken line, a true divider, with that tattoo existing as a kind of sigil meant to counteract the broken yellow lines on the highway.

But also, in a metatextual way, and looking at how works of art give way to another, the fermata is a hesitation mark, which just so happens to be the name of the 2013 album by Lynch's *Lost Highway* soundtrack collaborators, Nine Inch Nails, whom he directed in the music video "Came Back Haunted" from that same album.

What's more, the album *Hesitation Marks* contains a track called "Copy of A," which contains the lyrics,

> "I am just a copy of a copy of a copy, everything I say has come before… I am just a shadow of a shadow of a shadow, always tryin' to catch up with myself. I am just an echo of an echo of an echo, listening to someone's cry for help… I am little pieces of little pieces of little pieces, pieces that were picked up on the way."

The lyrics fit along the ideas grappled within *Lost Highway*. But they also present the notion that, while the original shape of the shadow may be stretched out or the echo heard in a slightly different key, we're all working off of what's come before, forming doppelgängers not simply based in looks and personality, but in our actions and ability to conjure up pieces of what's been done before and call it creation.

Lost Highway is hardly the only Lynch title to deal with the idea of the double. Doppelgängers or dual identities appear in *Mulholland Drive*, *Twin Peaks* and *Inland Empire*, while *Mulholland Drive* and *Lost Highway* – the films themselves – can be viewed as mirrors of one another. And as original an auteur as Lynch was, his work was inspired by many others. Next issue, we'll get into some of Lynch's influences, as well as those influenced by him. 💀

Tune in for Part 2 in Issue 28, in which Richard discusses Bergman's Persona, *Villeneuve's* Enemy, *Anderson's* Lake Mungo *and the unsung king of the double: Brian De Palma.*

MONSTRO FREDIPETE.

Let there be Lips!

Celebrating Fifty Years Of THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW

by Rebekah McKendry

I WOULD LIKE, IF I MAY, TO TAKE YOU ON A STRANGE JOURNEY.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show is turning fifty this year, and its legacy is still enthusiastically celebrated by shadow casts and film freaks around the globe. But for me personally, *Rocky Horror* is something more than just a fun night out hurling insults and rice at a movie screen. Honestly, I'm not sure I'd be here, or have pursued working in the horror film industry, if it was not for *Rocky Horror*. This movie altered my entire reality and is one of the main reasons I became who I am.

My history with *Rocky Horror* all began with chicken pox. We have a snazzy vaccine today, but back in the '90s when I was a kid that was not yet a thing. I didn't get chicken pox until I was a senior in high school. I'd always heard they were dangerous if you got them when you were older, and at the ripe ol' age of 17, they were so bad I was hospitalized and then out of school for several weeks. I had them under my fingernails, in my throat and lungs, inside my eyelids. All I could do was lie in bed and stare at the TV (it even hurt to blink).

To keep me from losing my goddamn mind, my mom kept me supplied with stacks of rented VHS tapes and even a few new fancy format DVDs. Per my instructions, she grabbed everything she could from the horror and cult sections. One of these films was *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

Perhaps it was my weakened state, but this first screening, though I was in utter pain, was divine. It was just so weird and somehow wonderful.

Flash-forward a year. I was at the organizational club fair during my first semester at Virginia Tech. While lost in a sea of sororities and sports teams, a light shined down on a booth in the corner: *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* Fan Club: The Tolls of Madness Cast. I had found my people.

I joined and began preforming in the college shadow cast, usually as Magenta or Trixie. I attended multiple *Rocky Horror* conventions and even won a performance award for "Best Trixie" at one of them. Eventually, I performed as Magenta in the musical stage show as well.

But the fan club didn't offer only a performance opportunity. The members celebrated all cult films. We had weekly screenings of the strangest, most hard-to-find films we could locate. We rejoiced in horror films that would make most of the hoity film professors at the school retch. We found artistic enlightenment in bizarre, transgressive, underground cinema. This amazing group of people opened my eyes to cinema, instilling in me the belief that there is nothing elite or pretentious about it. All cinema is art to someone, and every someone is important! The club was all about acceptance and creating safe spaces. I didn't feel like a freak here because they celebrated each other's freakiness. The RHPS club reshaped my entire understanding of what it means to study film and to be a good human, which ultimately determined my entire path forward. I would not be who I am and have the strong belief system I do without the life lessons I discovered in those wild movies and within the beautiful, weird cinema fans I watched them with.

THE AUTHOR, IN COSTUME AS TRIXIE.

L-R: NELL CAMPBELL (COLUMBIA), PATRICIA QUINN (MAGENTA), TIM CURRY (DR. FRANK-N-FURTER) AND RICHARD O'BRIEN (RIFF RAFF).

The History of THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW

Before those beautiful red lips graced movie screens, *Rocky Horror* existed as a stage musical, created by Richard O'Brien who would eventually go on to play Riff Raff in the movie. Directed by Jim Sharman (who would later direct the film adaptation, as well), the original stage show was in much the same form as the movie. Written as a simultaneous spoof and love letter for horror and science fiction films of the '30s through '60s, *Rocky Horror* follows two freshly engaged young adults as they happen upon the house of Dr. Frank-N-Furter, a transvestite mad scientist in the vein of Dr. Frankenstein who is currently celebrating the birth of his newest creation, a muscle-bound adonis named Rocky. Hilarity and weirdness ensue. The stage show was wildly popular, but there was not yet a cult audience hurling toast at the actors.

When producers decided to create the movie a few years later, they recruited much of the team from the stage show, including director, costumer and multiple actors, and in 1975 the movie *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* premiered in Los Angeles to awful reviews. Many critics commended the catchy songs, but the mix of music, dancing, kitschy aliens, kinky sex, and Tim Curry did not sit well with general film audiences.

The film quickly ended its original theatrical run, but then something happened. At this same time, several theaters in New York City had begun looking for ways to expand their income. The Elgin Theater was the first to start running movies at midnight

(beginning with Alejandro Jodorowsky's *El Topo*), and they quickly discovered that late-night screenings of non-mainstream movies were doing great with non-mainstream audiences. These screenings not only created a new revenue stream, but counter-culture film lovers came back for repeat viewings, thus creating some of our first cinematic cults. Midnight viewings became social events, and theaters searched for B-movies that could live a whole new life at the midnight spot.

In 1976, NYC's Waverly Theater began midnight screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* on April Fools' Day and, before long, audiences had memorized the movie enough to start talking back to the characters on-screen and joining them for dances in the aisles. Some fans came in costumes and brought props. The screenings spread to other cities across the US, as did the audience callback lines and participation rules. Eventually, most *Rocky Horror* midnight screenings across the country would include a "shadow cast," a group of actors dressed as the film's characters and performing the lines in front of the screen.

Fifty years later, *Rocky Horror* is one of the longest-running theatrical releases of all time, still continuously making its way through midnight circuits. But one cannot discuss the legacy of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* without discussing the man who brought the cult to life: Sal Piro. Sal was part of the original *Rocky* shadow cast at the Waverly Theater and was instrumental in spreading the movie to the masses, keeping it alive for decades to come. Sal became so synonymous with *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* that he was even given a cameo in the movie's sequel. Yes, there is a sequel to *Rocky Horror*. And yes, it, too, is brilliant in a vastly different way.

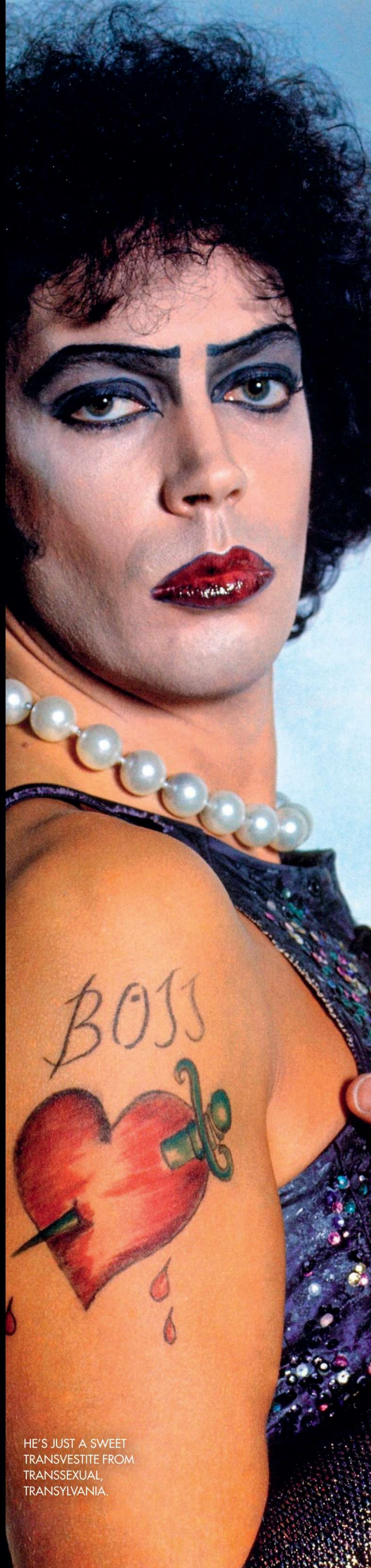
But going to a *Rocky Horror* screening is not just about seeing a movie or the fun of throwing toilet paper across a packed theater audience. It's about what the movie supports and symbolizes.

L-R: CURRY, SUSAN SARANDON (JANET), JONATHAN ADAMS (DR. EVERETT V. SCOTT), BARRY BOSTWICK (BRAD) AND QUINN.

Don't Dream it. Be it.

For decades, I have heard things labeled "the next *Rocky Horror Picture Show*," and many movies have tried. I've seen other musicals attempt shadow casts, dress-up days, sing-alongs – and some have been successful. But none has reached the level of popularity and enduring dedication of *Rocky Horror*. Now looking back after half a century, it is abundantly clear just how special *Rocky Horror* is. What was it about the songs that made people not only want to sing along, but to get up in the aisle and dance? What was it is about the rather convoluted plot that made masses want to act it out in full costume right along with the on-screen actors? There is something truly magical about the film that has brought cinematic outcasts together over the years to celebrate our connected love of weird movies in a weird manner, creating a life-changing experience for so many.

To celebrate *Rocky Horror*'s 50th anniversary, I recommend seeing the film in person with a full shadow cast, props, and all the virginal fun. Yes, the movie is still great at home in your pajamas, but it is a transcendent experience to be part of the madness. Or as Frank would say in his dulcet, sexy voice, "Don't dream it, be it!"



HE'S JUST A SWEET TRANSVESTITE FROM TRANSSEXUAL, TRANSYLVANIA.

BLUE SKIES AND BUSKERS:

MIKE FLANAGAN'S

The Life of Chuck

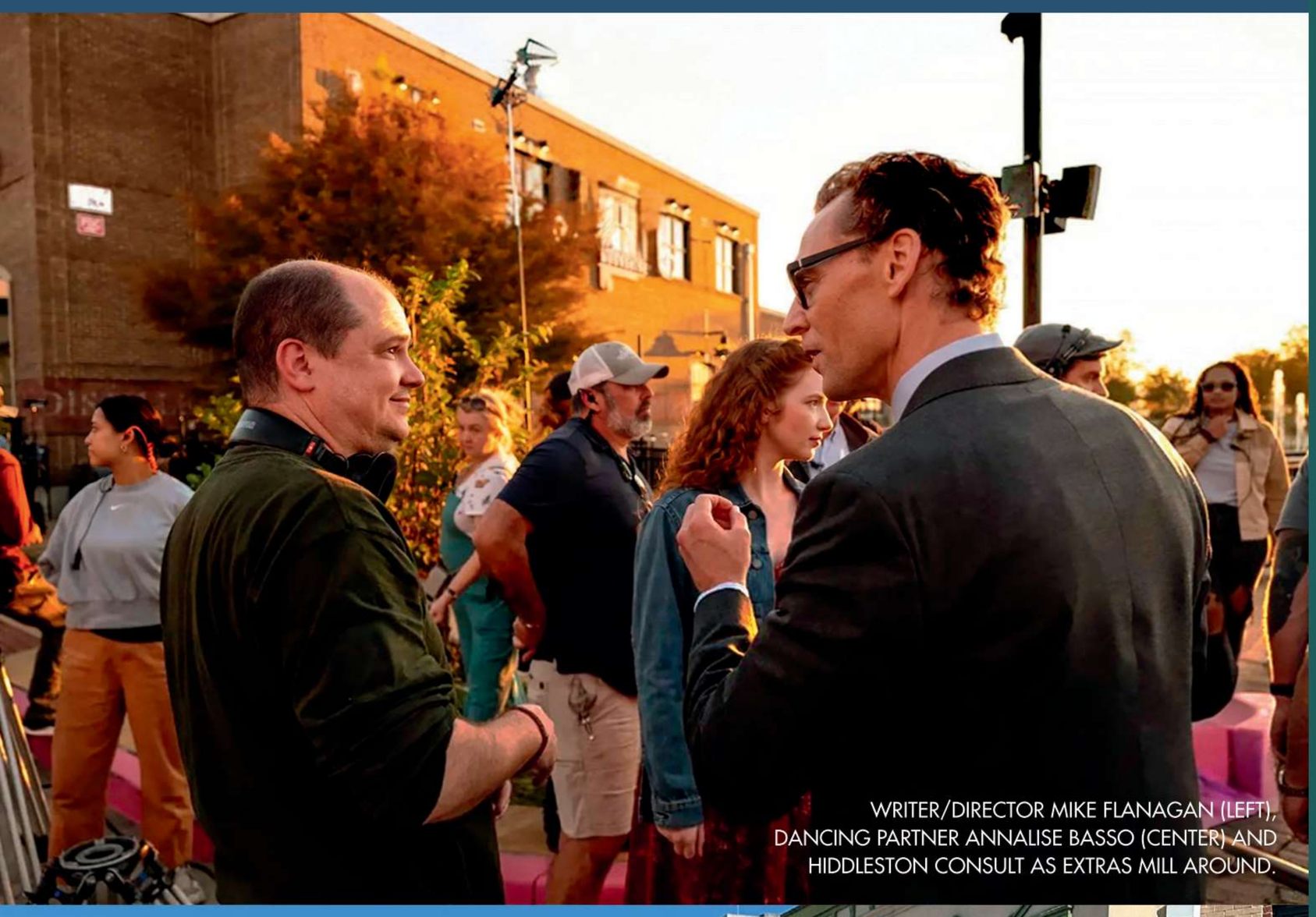
BY SCOTT WAMPLER

THE DIRECTOR OF GERALD'S GAME AND DOCTOR SLEEP TAKES ON ANOTHER STEPHEN KING PROPERTY, AND FANGO WAS INVITED TO VISIT THE SET.

LAST YEAR, WE LOST OUR BELOVED FRIEND, FANGORIA *CONTRIBUTOR AND* THE KINGCAST *CO-HOST SCOTT WAMPLER. THE OCTOBER BEFORE HE PASSED, HE VISITED THE SET OF MIKE FLANAGAN'S* THE LIFE OF CHUCK. *HE AND HIS* KINGCAST *CO-HOST ERIC VESPE WERE ASKED TO BE EXTRAS IN THE FILM, ADAPTED FROM STEPHEN KING'S NOVELLA OF THE SAME NAME. SCOTT WAS UNRESERVED IN HIS LOVE FOR ALL THINGS KING AND FLANAGAN, AND WE KNOW HE CONSIDERED THAT DAY AN ENORMOUS HONOR AND THRILL.*

FLANAGAN – A FREQUENT GUEST ON THE KINGCAST *AND A FRIEND OF SCOTT'S – ENDED UP DEDICATING* THE LIFE OF CHUCK *TO SCOTT. DURING THE FILM'S WORLD PREMIERE AT TIFF, FLANAGAN SAYS, "HE RECEIVED HIS OWN WAVE OF APPLAUSE WHEN THE CREDIT CAME UP."*

WE ARE PROUD AND GRATEFUL TO PUBLISH SCOTT'S REPORT FROM THAT DAY ON SET. IT FEELS A BIT LIKE MAGIC TO HAVE ONE LAST SCOTT WAMPLER BYLINE ON THE MASTHEAD. AS KING WROTE IN "THE LIFE OF CHUCK" ABOUT THE VERY SCENE SCOTT DESCRIBES BELOW, "THE GIRL NAILED IT WHEN SHE USED THE WORD MAGIC. SOMETIMES THERE IS SUCH A THING." -MB



WRITER/DIRECTOR MIKE FLANAGAN (LEFT), DANCING PARTNER ANNALISE BASSO (CENTER) AND HIDDLESTON CONSULT AS EXTRAS MILL AROUND.

A BUSKING DRUMMER (TAYLOR GORDON) PROVIDES THE RHYTHM FOR THE PIVOTAL DANCE SEQUENCE.

PHOTOS (BOTTOM) BY SCOTT WAMPLER • (TOP) COURTESY OF NEON

Nooo!"

Mike Flanagan bounds out of the video village tent where he's been observing a carefully choreographed dance sequence on a bank of monitors, looks skyward while holding one hand up to shield his eyes from the sun, and says, "Great. Another cloud."

We're in Foley, Alabama, at a sprawling resort complex known as OWA (a name inspired by the Muscogee Creek language meaning "big water"). The grounds include an indoor water park, roller coasters, a slew of restaurants and stores selling everything from souvenir hats to flavored moonshines – and today the whole place is eerily empty, serving as a sort of studio backlot for Flanagan's latest Stephen King adaptation, *The Life of Chuck*.

For several days now, the production has been posted up around one of the complex's many street corners, where an elaborate dance scene featuring Tom Hiddleston (as Chuck) and his co-star Annalise Basso is being filmed. In the scene, Chuck – a normal guy, an accountant on a work trip – is inspired to a moment of joyful spontaneity by the rhythmic pounding of a busking drummer. Chuck grabs the hand of a woman he does not know, and together they shake, shimmy, and swing their way to glory in front of a crowd of onlookers. Hiddleston and Basso have been practicing this routine for six weeks, and all their hard work has paid off: it's a gorgeous thing to behold, beautiful in both its intricacy and in the visible thrill both performers clearly feel while executing it. (At one point, I overhear Hiddleston describe his and Basso's dynamic in the scene as "champagne bottles being uncorked.")

The only problem? Those goddamn clouds, none of which were on the call-sheet. Every time one of them sweeps across the sun, the natural lighting changes drastically.

Later, on email, Flanagan recalls, "We were spending four days filming a sequence that is meant to take place over the course of about ten minutes. That meant we had to pick a lane regarding the weather. Over the course of four consecutive days in Alabama, we would get a variety of weather conditions. We scheduled it as the

very first thing we'd shoot because, if it started raining or we had storms, we had room to push it back into the schedule. When it was clear we weren't dealing with rain, we were very relieved – but the forecast called instead for 'partly cloudy' conditions. That turned out to be a huge question mark. If we started filming while it was cloudy, we'd be in trouble when the sun came out, and vice versa. The important thing was that the sequence feel like it occurs in real time, and that all of the usable footage captured over those four separate days would cut together and look consistent."

They decided to count on sunlight because, Flanagan reasons, "the scene itself was so exuberant." And, luckily, the sun mostly cooperated, though the cast and crew would "frequently have to wait if a large cloud formation passed in front of the sun."

Yes, a single cloud could ruin entire takes, which would be annoying under any circumstances but feels particularly aggravating when the shoot is already so demanding on Flanagan's performers.

"While we were doing five-minute dance takes, the crew and the actors knew that if they felt the sunlight go out of their eyes in the middle of the dance, they should keep going even though that footage would likely never make it into the movie itself. It's a frustration I'm very used to, but it certainly added a level of anxiety to the week."

And earlier in the week, an unusually high number of planes created their own series of headaches, Flanagan adds, although that's not a new one for the filmmaker.

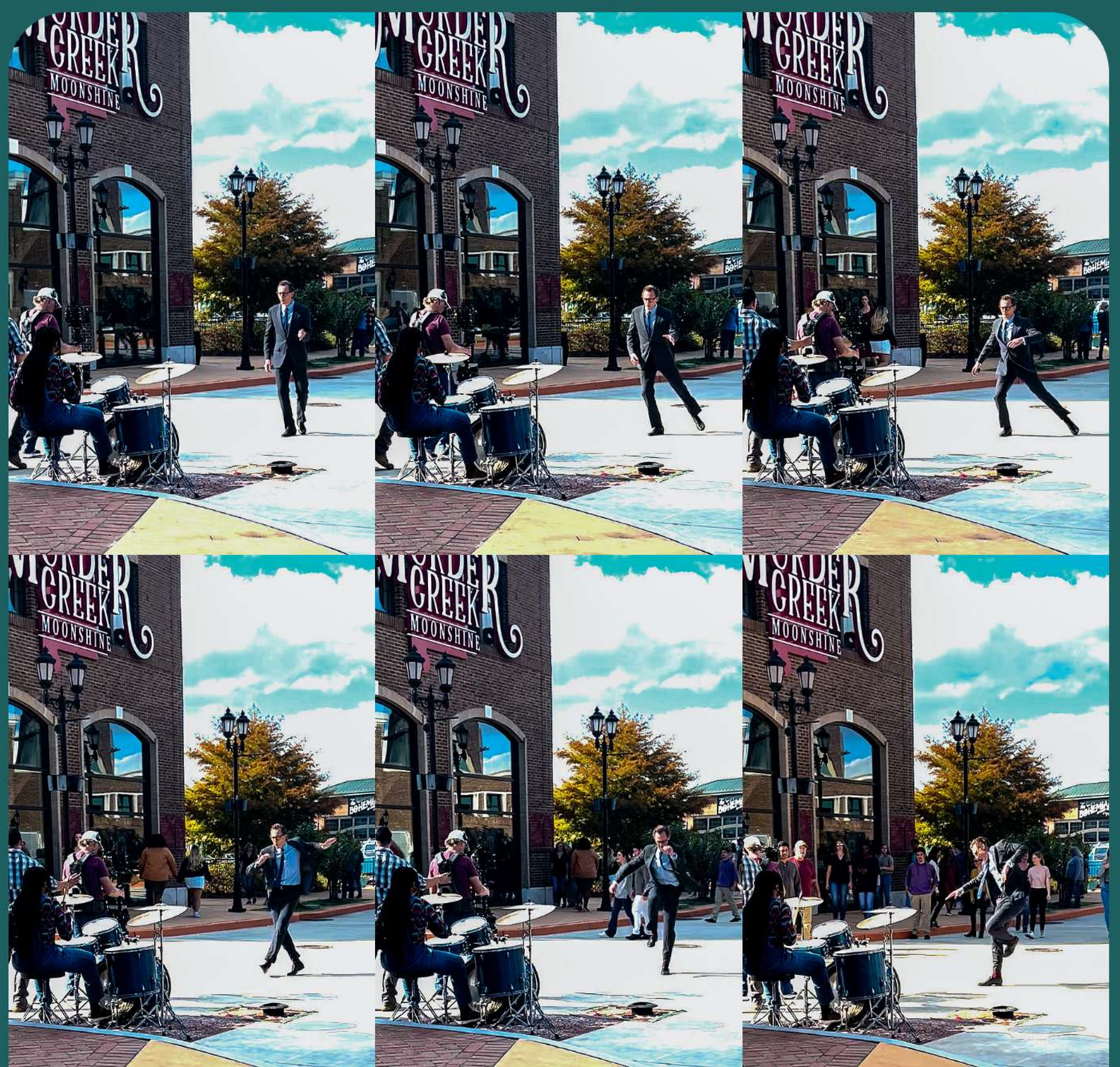
"They've always been the bane of my existence," Flanagan says of airplanes. "I don't believe in ADR [automated dialogue replacement]; I strongly prefer to capture the vocal performances of my actors on set, on the day itself, and not just fix it in post. That means we will wait for an airplane to pass if it is too loud, and for some reason, people were circling the location with small, and quite loud, Cessnas throughout the week. That wasn't such a big deal while we were doing the dancing – the drums drowned it all out – but during the dialogue it was a real pain in the ass. It always is. Over the years, my crew has taken about four dozen candid pictures of me standing on set holding my middle finger to the sky."

One might expect to see many things while visiting the set of a Stephen King adaptation, but a life-affirming dance sequence is probably not one of them. But then, *The Life of Chuck* is no ordinary Stephen King adaptation. Based on one of the Master of Horror's recent novellas (it appeared in his 2020 collection *If It Bleeds*), *The Life of Chuck* tells the life story of one Chuck Krantz through three highly specific chapters in his life. The sequence Flanagan and company have been filming for the past four days comes from the middle chapter, and – as it was in the novella that inspired it – is intended to be the centerpiece of the film.

Flanagan confirms of the scene, "The whole movie hangs on it. It lands at just about perfectly halfway through the runtime, and it is literally a showstopper. There aren't always sequences that define a story as completely as this one does. It's the cornerstone of the architecture of this story, and this character, and it is one of my favorite scenes I've ever been lucky enough to shoot. It's one of my favorite scenes in *anything*, really."

Stephen King adaptations are a genre unto themselves, and Flanagan has carved out a particular corner of that genre for himself: he's the guy who tackles the King tales no one else would have the nerve to adapt. It started with 2017's *Gerald's Game*. That novel unfolds almost entirely within the

One might expect to see many things while visiting the set of a Stephen King adaptation, but a life-affirming dance sequence is probably not one of them.



mind of its main character, Jessie, who finds herself handcuffed to a headboard in a remote cabin with no means for escape after her husband has a heart attack before the sexual fantasy he intended to carry out can occur. Then came 2019's *Doctor Sleep*, a sequel to King's *The Shining* and one of the author's most divisive novels. The *Life of Chuck*, with its strange structure (each of its three chapters is told in chronological reverse) and unusual narrative, certainly feels of a piece with the allegedly "unadaptable" King projects Flanagan has taken on in the past.

Flanagan takes issue with the very word in the first place. "People throw the word 'unadaptable' around, and often times they're just meaning that something is particularly difficult. *Gerald's Game* was the only one that I questioned. For a lot of years, I'd think about that book and say, 'How the hell would someone do that…' and then it was a single eureka moment that finally made me able to visualize the movie. For *Doctor Sleep* and *Life of Chuck*, that wasn't the case. Both of those felt clear to me. Not easy, but clear. There are very few things that I imagine are truly unadaptable – *House of Leaves*, perhaps – but with Stephen King, his stories live and die on their characters. He provides the best possible road map for adaptation, and that's to follow the compass of the characters. It's only when that gets lost that people tend to lose their way."

Back on set, while we're waiting for the latest cloud to pass, I ask Flanagan and his cinematographer, Eben Bolter, how extensive the storyboarding process was on the four-day dance sequence. Flanagan lights up and says, "Oh, you gotta show him the bible." Bolter disappears inside and returns with a gigantic binder. Flipping it open, I see that the entire film has been storyboarded, every shot from top to bottom. The images on the page are essentially pre-viz thumbnails, but it's all there… except for one thing: the dance scene.

"Tom and Annalise were rehearsing this with our choreographer for the past month and a half," Flanagan tells me, "which means we weren't 100% sure what it would look like in action until a few weeks ago. So none of that's in this binder." I am dumbfounded to learn that this is the case, but it's clear the limited time Flanagan and Bolter had to work with did nothing to break their stride; every single camera angle has been planned to the nth degree, and by the time they're done running Hiddleston

PHOTOS (LEFT) BY SCOTT WAMPLER • (RIGHT) COURTESY OF NEON

FELICIA (KAREN GILLAN) IS A HOSPITAL WORKER IN A WORLD THAT SEEMS TO BE CRUMBLING, AS MYSTERIOUS IMAGES OF CHUCK APPEAR IN UNEXPECTED PLACES.

FLANAGAN AND HIS SON, CODY, WHO PLAYS A YOUNGER VERSION OF CHUCK IN THE FILM.

THE 10-MINUTE SCENE TOOK FOUR DAYS TO FILM, THANKS TO A WHOLE LOT OF MOVING PARTS.

HIDDLESTON PREPARES TO BUST A MOVE.

Flanagan is the guy who tackles the Stephen King tales no one else would have the nerve to adapt.

and Basso through their paces, they'll have coverage from just about every conceivable angle. Speaking as a guy who has next to zero organizational skills, my mind reels at the sheer amount of work that went into prepping and executing this.

The cloud passes, and everyone – including the dozens upon dozens of background actors this scene calls for – returns to their starting positions. Flanagan and Bolter return to video village. I position myself inside the building, directly behind where the drumming busker is set up and beyond a sheer curtain that allows me to watch as Hiddleston first pauses mid-stroll, begins dancing, and then offers a hand to Basso, who joins him in the center of the gathering crowd. The camera tracks them as they glide across the pavement, weaving together and then apart as the onlookers cheer. They've been at this for days and yet their energy never seems to flag. From end to end, the whole thing takes about five or six minutes, and then Flanagan calls "Cut!" It's time to move on to one more camera set-up, this one involving a crane.

By the time the shot's set up, the clouds have almost completely dissipated. Hiddleston moves into his starting position; the crane operators are in place. This is the last shot Flanagan needs to nail before this particular sequence can be put to bed, and there's a palpable tension among the background actors and crew, all of whom, again, have been at this for days. I make a point *not* to be inside video village for this one, choosing instead to return to my position just behind the curtained door. I'll see the final footage in the movie one day, but for now I want to live in this beautiful (albeit manufactured) moment one more time, to see Hiddleston and Basso beaming while the sweat pours down their faces. When the take ends, everyone inside video village erupts in applause.

Flanagan comes storming out of the tent. He's visibly moved, hugging the actors as the background extras continue their applause. Everyone knows they've just witnessed a perfect take – possibly the final take for this scene. They know they've all just participated in something important, and the outpouring of joy is an incredible thing to witness. Eventually Flanagan wanders into the center of the crowd to address them.

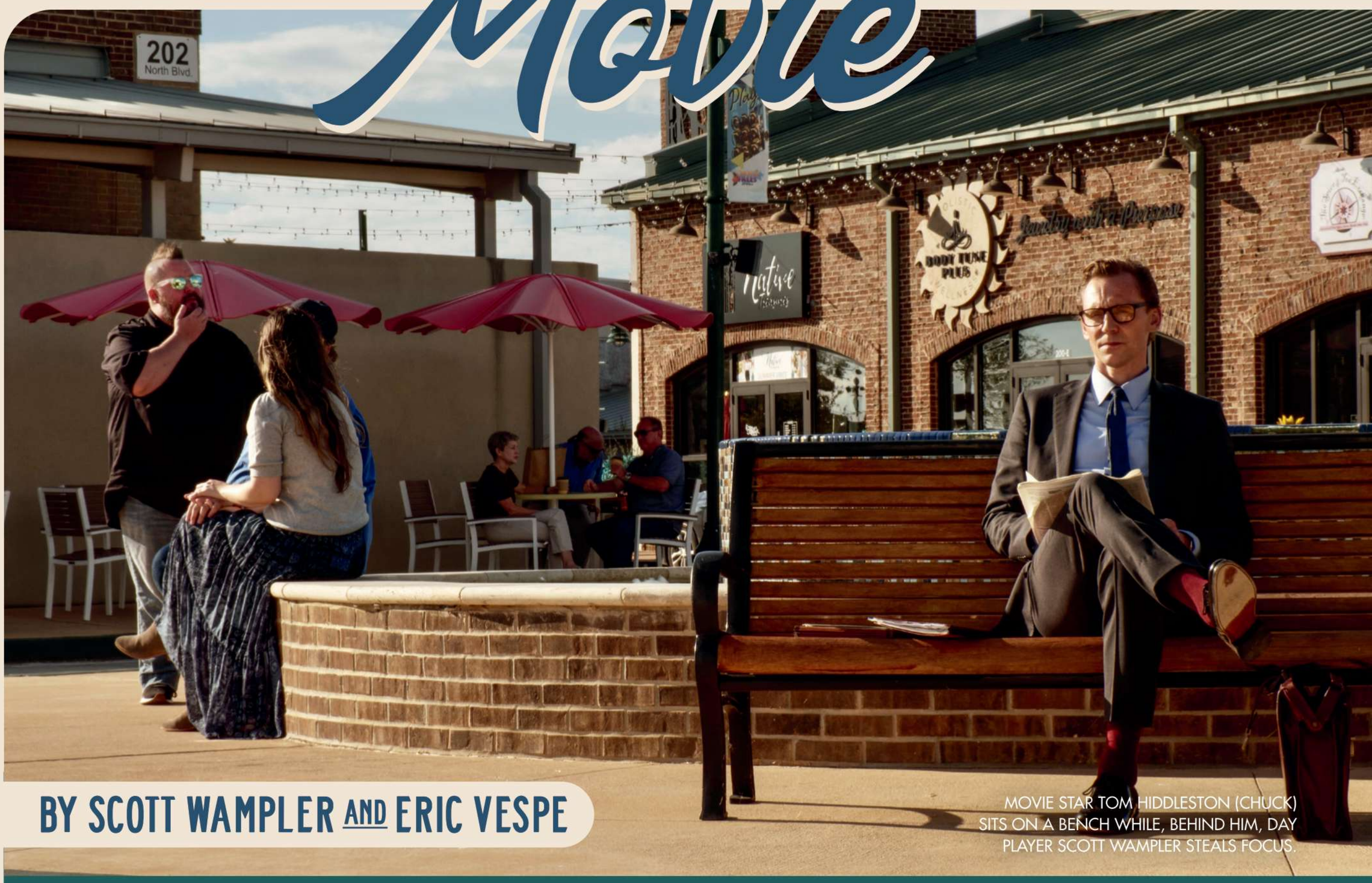
"All right, everyone, that's it," he says. "I don't honestly think we're going to get anything more perfect than that."

The crowd goes utterly apeshit. As they cheer, Flanagan reintroduces each of the scene's key players one by one, and they all wave and bow to the crowd around them after four days of intense work. It's legitimately emotional, difficult to watch without getting at least a little choked up. As the sun beats down overhead, Flanagan calls everyone together in the center of the intersection for a massive cast and crew photo and, while it might not be true in the literal sense, it sure feels as though there's not a cloud in the sky. 💀

PHOTOS (TOP) BY SCOTT WAMPLER • (BOTTOM) COURTESY OF NEON

HIDDLESTON DESCRIBES HIS DYNAMIC WITH BASSO AS "CHAMPAGNE BOTTLES BEING UNCORKED."

I WAS AN EXTRA IN A STEPHEN KING *Movie*



MOVIE STAR TOM HIDDLESTON (CHUCK) SITS ON A BENCH WHILE, BEHIND HIM, DAY PLAYER SCOTT WAMPLER STEALS FOCUS.

BY SCOTT WAMPLER AND ERIC VESPE

HAVING ACQUIRED A CUP OF COFFEE FROM THE STARBUCKS AROUND THE CORNER, I RETURN TO VIDEO VILLAGE ON THE SET OF MIKE FLANAGAN'S *THE LIFE OF CHUCK* AND FIND MY *KINGCAST* CO-HOST, ERIC VESPE, SPEAKING TO A WOMAN WITH A CLIPBOARD.

"W-A-M-P-L-E-R," he's telling her as I approach.

"That's me," I say. "What's up?"

"I'm with wardrobe," she says. "Just getting some information so we can get you paid."

This is an unexpected development. You get invited to any film set, that's something of a privilege. You get invited to the set of a Stephen King movie when you earn a living hosting a Stephen King podcast, that's an honor. When the director then informs you that he's found a way to insert you and your co-host into the movie, in the background of a scene featuring MCU superstar Tom Hiddleston, well, I'm not sure what the hell you call that, but whatever it is – you certainly don't expect to be paid for it.

The woman with the clipboard takes Vespe and me over to the wardrobe area. Shirts, light jackets and dresses hang from a series of racks, all of them simple, single-color, and completely free of logos. This is where the background actors get fitted out every day, and she's showing us the options. "We've got all of these," she says, gesturing to the racks, "but if you've got anything that works, you could just wear your own clothes."

We showed up to set that morning halfway expecting to shoot our cameo that afternoon, so we're both dressed in a manner we figured would be fine for extra work. Turns out, I was aware of the rules regarding black clothing and logos (none of them kosher), but this business about patterns is new information to me. It makes sense – you don't want one extra wandering around in the background looking like they just made a stop at Dan Flash's – but the plaid pearl-snap shirt I'm wearing is definitely not going to work for the shoot.

"Tell you what," she says. "I'll stop by Walmart tonight and get a few more options for you." -SW...

PHOTO COURTESY OF NEON

...This is as far as Scott Wampler got in his story. Just shy of a year after Wampler's passing, *The Life of Chuck* is set to hit theater screens, a film about the preciousness of the small moments in life and all the unexpected impacts the death of a single person can have, both in the world they've left behind and the infinite other worlds they didn't even know existed.

The movie features Scott in a cameo role. As his partner in crime on THE KINGCAST and on this set visit, I'll try my best to pick up where Scott left off, which I believe is the punchline to this wardrobe story.

My choice of a solid blue shirt, logo-free ballcap, and jeans was immediately approved. My then-girlfriend, now fiancée, was put into an outfit that fit her perfectly with no issues, but the morning we showed up for our cameos, the person in charge of wardrobe produced what I can only describe as a skin-tight muumuu for Scott to wear for his big moment.

I'll never forget the look on Scott's face when he stepped out of the dressing room. His cheeks were bright red with a furious combination of embarrassment and annoyance as his round shape was outlined for the world to see.

"I am NOT wearing this," he said. The person in charge of wardrobe went immediately into damage control and tried to tell Scott that he looked great in it, but the red was starting to creep from Scott's cheeks up to his scalp all the way to the roots of his short mohawk.

Scott's solution was simple: get an exception from Flanagan himself to use his own, very Wampler-esque, wardrobe. It was Flanagan's idea to throw us in the movie in the first place, so Scott calmly put his button-down shirt back on, marched out of the wardrobe office, onto the street where they were shooting, and right up to Flanagan, who was thankfully between takes and listened to his slightly flustered and very annoyed friend as he explained the situation.

My memory of this moment is mostly Flanagan's sly smile as Scott pleaded his case for why he needed to wear his own shirt – the ill-fitting muumuu wouldn't benefit his film, you see – while he waited for Scott to finish so he could ultimately say, "Wear whatever you want."

It looked like the weight of the world was lifted off Scott's shoulders. His red face returned to its normal color and all that remained were the nerves of having to share the screen with a bona fide movie star.

No, not me. Tom Hiddleston.

You can read about the scene we saw filmed in Scott's set visit report on page 82. The lead-up to this moment is where your intrepid KINGCAST hosts got their time to shine. Chuck (Hiddleston) is sitting with a cup of coffee just kind of killing time. His back is to a lovely fountain and, sitting on the lip of that fountain, are me and Kelsey, arm in arm, having a mimed conversation with Wampler who is standing and facing the camera.

When Hiddleston arrived for the scene, the first thing Flanagan did was introduce us as the hosts of one of his favorite podcasts, making a cameo appearance in the movie. I warned Hiddleston that, with the raw star power planted behind him in this sequence, nobody was going to notice what he was doing in the foreground. Little did I know that my dumb joke might have had some truth to it, as at least a small slice of the audience for *The Life of Chuck* is going to be keeping an eye peeled for one last look at Scott in this scene.

Cameras rolled and Scott, Kelsey, and I pretended we were deep in conversation, silently mouthing words like "watermelon" and "simultaneously" which read well on camera. The whole thing took maybe 15 minutes and then they were moving on. We secured our places back at video village, and watched as they picked up more of Hiddleston's dance sequence, which was a joy to observe. Flanagan spent a lot of time on this one scene because he knew it was crucial to the overall point of the story, which is that our lives are comprised of a few moments of pure happiness that end up being more meaningful than a promotion or buying a house or any of the other supposed major life accomplishments.

That's how I'll always remember our days visiting this set with Wampler. At the time it was a cool thing we got to do as big Stephen King nerds who run a podcast about his work and its adaptations. But looking back now, it represents something of a high-water mark for this little podcast we cooked up during the height of COVID, and one of the last adventures we got to go on together.

Wampler will be forever memorialized in the finished film that is sure to remind us that we all contain multitudes, and perhaps we'll even remember that these small moments of pure happiness aren't so small after all.

In the end, the small moments are everything. -EV 💀

PHOTO BY ALEX MAGISTRO

L-R: ERIC VESPE, KELSEY RAE, SCOTT WAMPLER, AND DIRECTOR MIKE FLANAGAN

DREAD AND LOVING IT

BY YULISSA MORALES

I fucking love horror movies. I'm not sure if I'm allowed to curse here, but I did – don't get mad at me, FANGORIA! Truth is, I really do and I'm lucky to work in horror as the VP of US Distribution and Creative over at DREAD. Have you heard about us? You probably know Dread Central as a top horror news source on the web since 2006. Eight years ago, Dread Central entered into an unholy union with Epic Pictures, makers of cult favorites *Turbo Kid* and *Tales of Halloween*. They fell in love and created a terrifying, bloody, sometimes gross little horror label named DREAD!

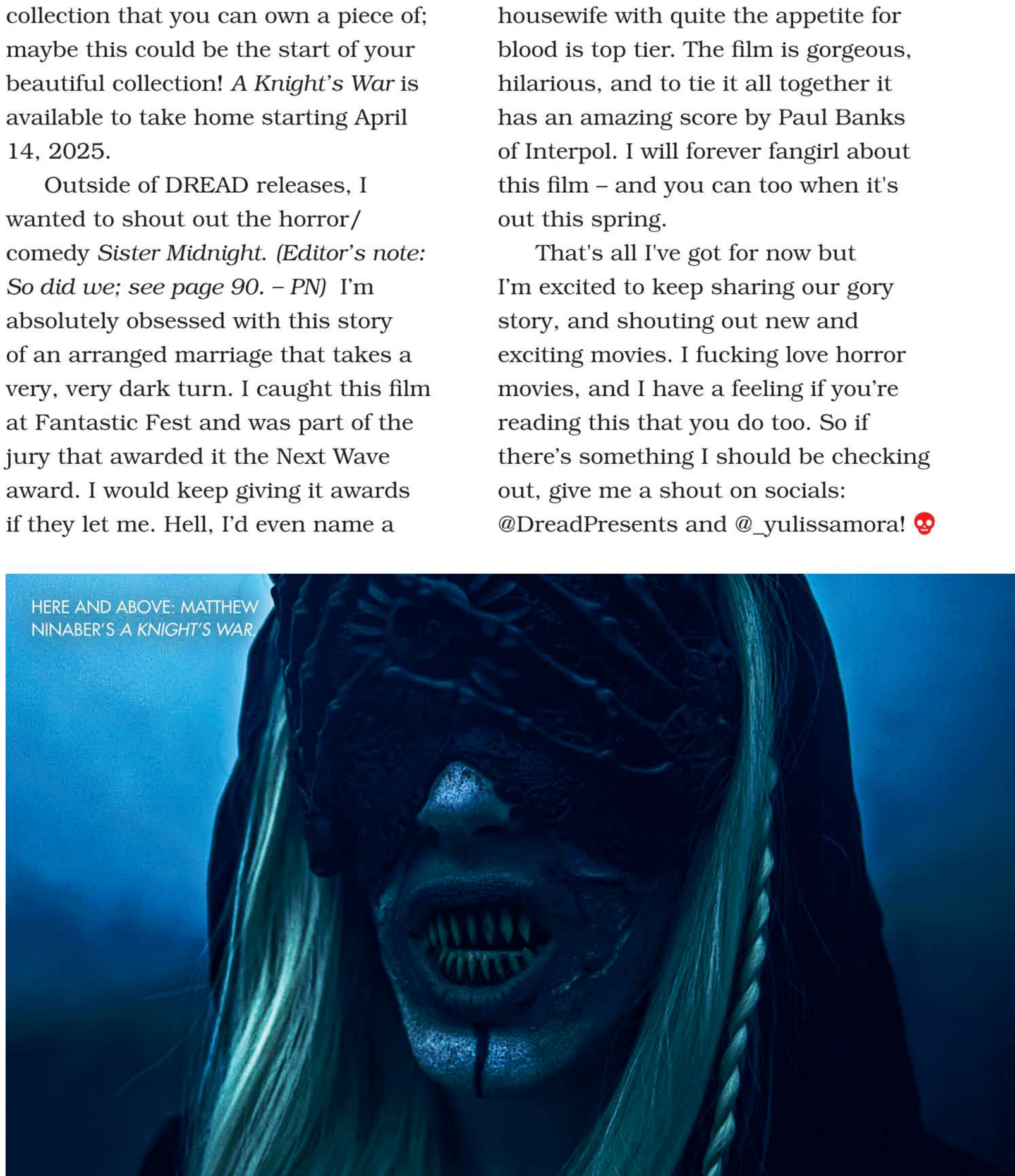
In those eight years, DREAD has independently produced and/or distributed some incredible horror fare such as *Benny Loves You*, *Beezel*, *The Hangman*, and the OG *Terrifier*. We're really proud of that last one! In all seriousness, it feels like we're only just getting started.

We are forever in awe of the incredibly talented filmmakers that we get to count in the DREAD family and excited for all of you to discover our wares, both new and old. And I've been given the honor – and terrifying responsibility – of gracing the pages of Fango to share the lore of our label and highlight some titles we think you sickos will appreciate.

Recently, we released *A Knight's War*, in which a knight braves a deadly realm where he has to face witches, demons, and all sorts of terrifying escapades that I for sure would not survive. If you're into fantasy horror – think Ridley Scott's *Legend* and David Lowery's *The Green Knight* – then this one is for you! We are huge supporters of physical media and have a numbered collection that you can own a piece of; maybe this could be the start of your beautiful collection! *A Knight's War* is available to take home starting April 14, 2025.

Outside of DREAD releases, I wanted to shout out the horror/comedy *Sister Midnight*. *(Editor's note: So did we; see page 90. – PN)* I'm absolutely obsessed with this story of an arranged marriage that takes a very, very dark turn. I caught this film at Fantastic Fest and was part of the jury that awarded it the Next Wave award. I would keep giving it awards if they let me. Hell, I'd even name a sandwich after it. The way writer/director Karan Kandhari showcases female rage is punk af, and Radhika Apte's performance as a disillusioned housewife with quite the appetite for blood is top tier. The film is gorgeous, hilarious, and to tie it all together it has an amazing score by Paul Banks of Interpol. I will forever fangirl about this film – and you can too when it's out this spring.

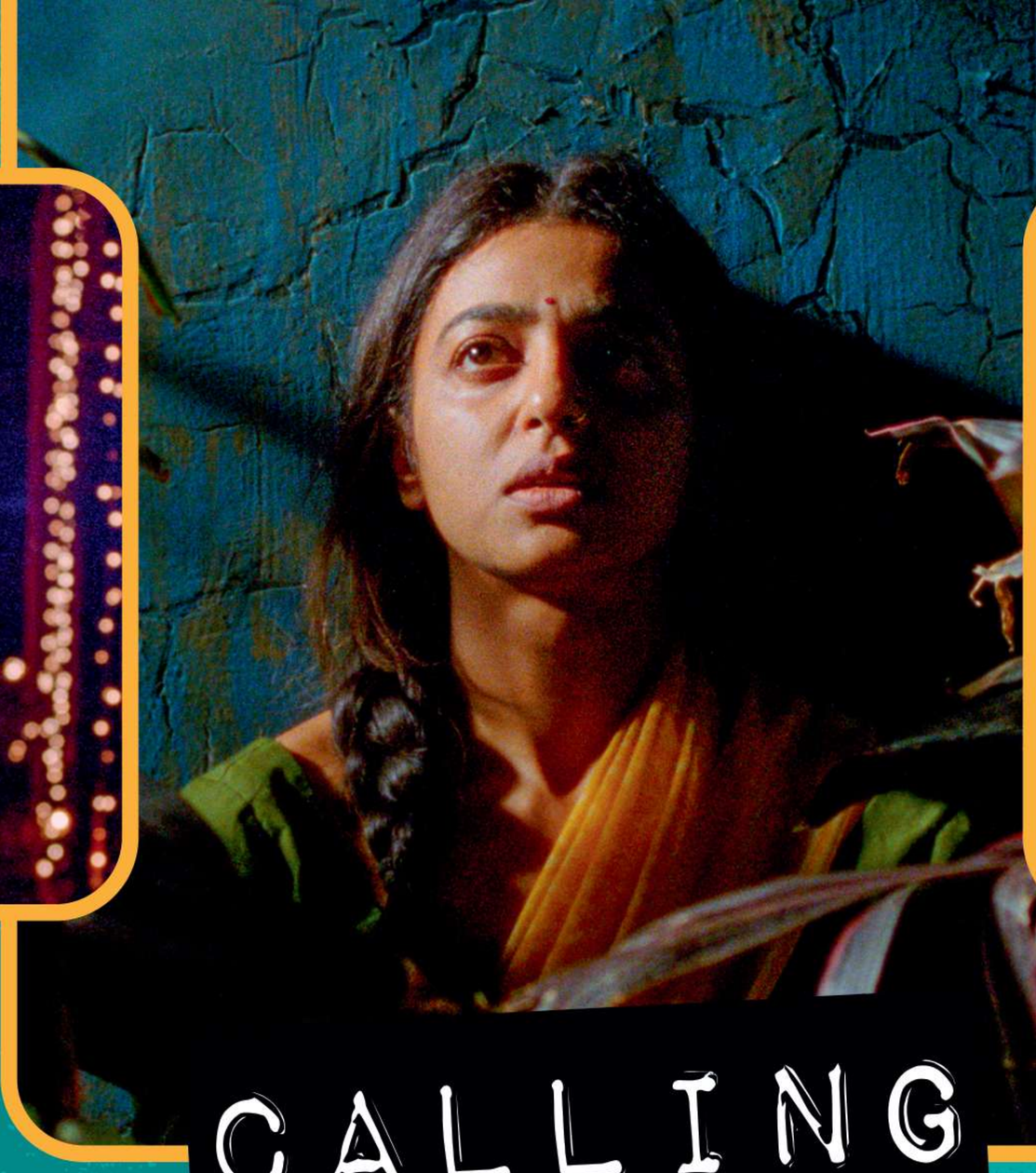
That's all I've got for now but I'm excited to keep sharing our gory story, and shouting out new and exciting movies. I fucking love horror movies, and I have a feeling if you're reading this that you do too. So if there's something I should be checking out, give me a shout on socials: @DreadPresents and @_yulissamora! 💀



HERE AND ABOVE: MATTHEW NINABER'S *A KNIGHT'S WAR*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DREAD

THE MANY FACES OF RADHIKA APTE AS UMA.



CALLING 8ISTER MIDNIGHT

WRITER/DIRECTOR KARAN KANDHARI AND STAR RADHIKA APTE OPEN UP ABOUT THE GENRE-DEFYING NEW FILM.

by Brett Gallman

Like many filmmakers, Karan Kandhari never imagined he would one day be interviewed for FANGORIA magazine. However, in this case, it's because the Indian writer/director's debut feature *Sister Midnight* is so utterly defiant of the very notion of genre that he never even considered it a horror film. It's a claim that may give fans pause, especially in an era where industry terms like "elevated horror" feel like an effort to disavow or look down upon a historically disreputable genre. Rest assured that this isn't true of Kandhari, who simply doesn't like the idea of being confined to any particular mode or style: simply put, *Sister Midnight* is a singular experience hatched by a distinctive filmmaker who doesn't even think in purely cinematic terms when hatching a project.

WHAT IS THIS, *SEVERANCE*?

Instead, he looks beyond the medium, often to music – which should come as no surprise since *Sister Midnight* borrows its title from an Iggy Pop song. "Music is my big love," he explains. "I get soldered to music when I'm writing, and oftentimes, even if it's not the music that ends up in the film, it's the thing that helps me find what I'm looking for in a scene." Kandhari was particularly drawn to the anarchic nature of Pop's work, and it became the guiding force. "Iggy Pop is my idol," he reveals. "There's a lot of his spirit in there; The Stooges were the most amazing band because it's a miracle they even existed. You listen to them now, and it still sounds fresher than anything trying to mimic it because it's just unbridled expression."

"Miracle" is a word that could also describe *Sister Midnight*, a project that Kandhari has been pursuing for a decade, and he attributes his determination to his punk upbringing. "Punk rock is a molecule, not a jacket or three chords," he says. "It took ten years to get this made specifically because it didn't follow any rules and confused a lot of people. I don't believe there's a golden rule to story structure." This notion quickly becomes evident when the film unfolds along a crooked path to follow the exploits of Uma (Radhika Apte), a disaffected, recently married woman whose life takes a bizarre turn when she takes to the streets of Mumbai, where she discovers both her feral impulses and an unexpected kinship with her neighbors. It's a synopsis that doesn't even begin to capture this idiosyncratic exploration of arrested development and loneliness.

APTE (LEFT) AND ASHOK PATHAK AS GOPAL.

Kandhari asserts that *Sister Midnight* finds kinship with the horror genre in its sympathetic depiction of misunderstood outsiders. "We've taken an archetypal character that people have seen in horror films and treated it in a non-horror way," he teases. He's hesitant to confirm the specific nature of that archetype, citing both his desire for viewers to be as surprised as possible and his reluctance to confirm any one interpretation of Uma's journey. He does assure me that he drew inspiration from more classical takes on the iconography, something he feels has been missing with recent takes. "This archetype is one of the greatest outsiders ever," he claims. "But it's kind of lost that throughout the past century, and I wanted to return to being sympathetic and melancholy towards the creature because it's such a cursed existence."

"It took ten years to get this made specifically because it didn't follow any rules and confused a lot of people. I don't believe there's a golden rule to story structure."

– KARAN KANDHARI

HERE AND ABOVE: UMA (APTE) IS A MISFIT TRYING TO FIND OUT WHERE SHE BELONGS AFTER A MYSTERIOUS LIFE CHANGE.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MAGNET RELEASING

While *Sister Midnight* sounds anarchic, it's best described as controlled chaos since Kandhari paints a nuanced portrait of a woman looking to find herself amongst fellow lost souls. Undoubtedly the film's lynchpin, Uma is a complex woman the official synopsis hails as a "misanthropic newlywed," a label Kandhari isn't quick to embrace. "I wouldn't call her

DIRECTOR KARAN KANDHARI SAYS HE WOULD NOT HAVE MADE *SISTER MIDNIGHT* IF HE HADN'T FOUND THE PERFECT UMA. LUCKILY HE FOUND HER IN APTE.

misanthropic," he asserts. "I would call her endearing, and that comes from the fact that Uma is quite innocent." He goes on to describe the character as a "man-child" who's simply learning how to grow up in a world she doesn't understand. "The whole film is really about not having a manual for life," he explains. "She doesn't know how to be a woman, an adult, a partner, or this archetype we're talking about."

Finding the right actress was crucial for Kandhari, and the long search nearly prevented the film from being made at all. "I almost didn't make the film because I didn't find anyone," he reveals before explaining that an acquaintance recommended Radhika Apte for the role. "I saw a very short clip, and I knew I had to meet this person," he raves. "I was just sold – I could just see something." In fact, the director was so sure that Apte was meant for this role that he couldn't imagine anyone else playing Uma. "If she wasn't going to do it, I was probably not going to make the film," he says. "It's such a difficult role – the film is on her shoulders, and I couldn't be prouder of her performance. It was like going to work with the best imaginary friend every day because I've lived with the character for so long and she brought it to life."

Apte was similarly drawn to *Sister Midnight* immediately upon reading the script. "I couldn't put it down, honestly," she says. "It was so bizarre and quite crazy, and I thought if it was done exactly how Karan wanted it to be done, it could be very interesting." Even though she knew the outlandish premise carried some risk, she knew the role could also be rewarding precisely because it offered something fresh. "I don't think I've ever played a role like this," she says, specifically citing the script's comedic dimension. "I love comedy, and I loved that the thought process here was not linear. I had absolutely no idea how to do it, and that was quite challenging."

"The whole film is really about not having a manual for life."
– KARAN KANDHARI

Eventually, Apte found her footing by latching onto the film's empathy for Uma and her fellow misfits. "There was something very egalitarian about the film," she offers. "There was such compassion and empathy towards all the characters that spoke to me." She echoes her director's thoughts about her character, noting that she too finds Uma to be very "childlike" during her quest. "There's a worldly wisdom in that," she says about Uma's curiosity about the world around her. "She asks 'why' to absolutely everything: 'Why am I supposed to be here?' 'Why is this the norm?'" Like Kandhari, she believes the film's horror elements are "secondary" to its general observations about life. "It's really not about that – Uma could have been anything," she notes before adding that the film speaks a universal language despite its distinct cultural roots. "You're hoping to erase boundaries, and the film does this quite well. It doesn't just belong to India – it doesn't really belong to anybody, to any religion, to any country. It's such a universal story."

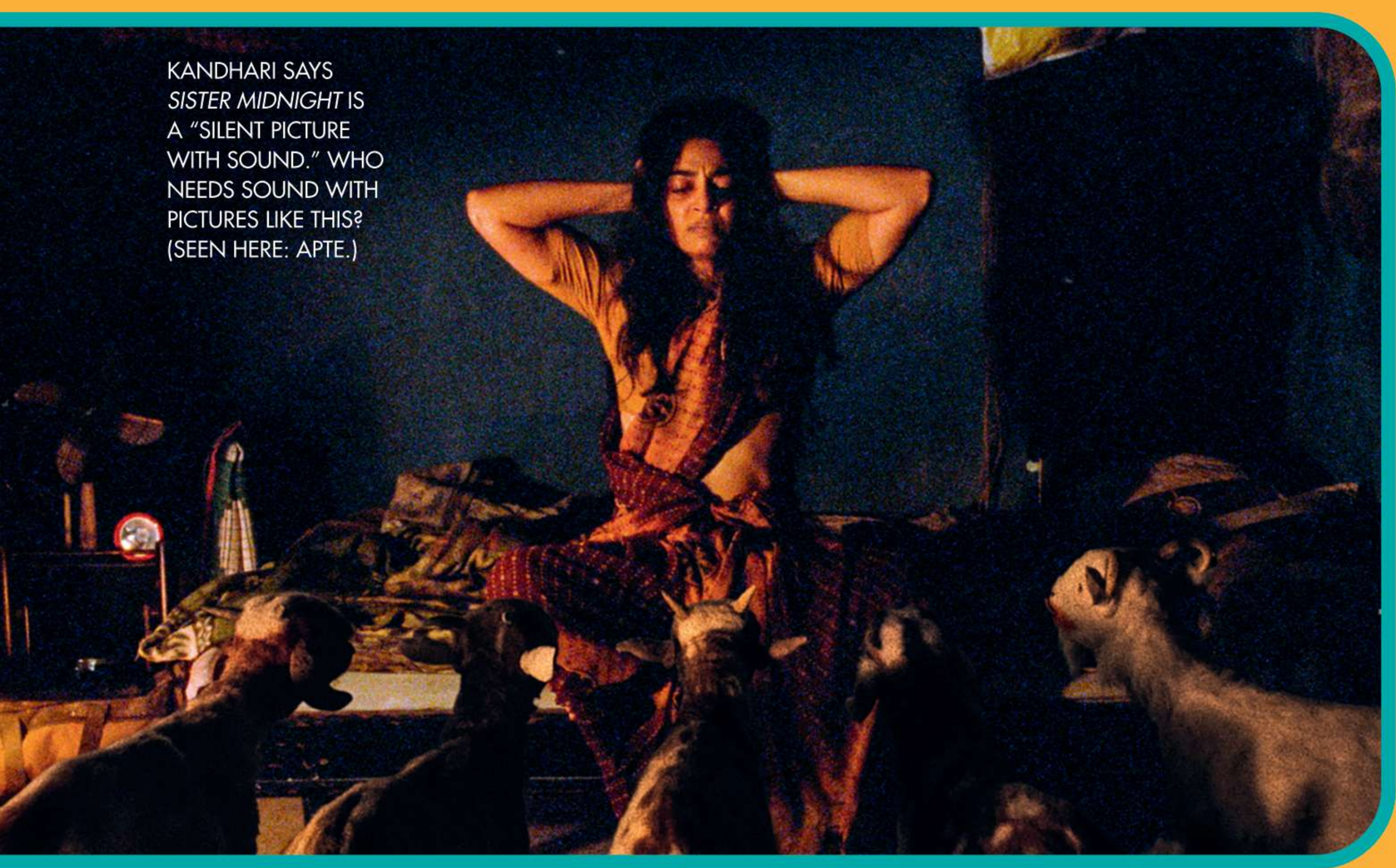
Kandhari agrees, arguing that *Sister Midnight* lives up to its title in its treatment of the community of twilight loners Uma finds. "It's a film about loneliness," he says. "It's set in the after-hours where all these misfits dwell," he adds before revealing how his setting guided the film. "Bombay is a nocturnal city," he muses. "It was more subconscious that Uma would somehow find all these other misfits on her journey in a city she doesn't belong to." He then points to another musical influence in Lou Reed, whose work has a lonely, dusky quality he tried to harness in *Sister Midnight*. "A lot of his music features scenes of people on the fringes in the nocturnal hours in New York," he says. "I was trying to capture

SISTER MIDNIGHT RUNS FROM BOX-CHECKING GENRE TROPES.

something like that so that's what I mean in terms of music and other art forms feeding more than film does."

However, don't take this to mean that Kandhari doesn't have cinematic influences. He often draws from what he considers to be the purest expression of the form: silent movies. "It's really what powers my filmmaking," he insists. "If I can do it with the least amount of dialogue possible, I will." He points to one legendary silent era star in particular as a monumental influence on *Sister Midnight*, which he refers to as a "silent picture with sound."

"Buster Keaton is my hero," he says. "What that man could do with very few cuts and body language is mind-blowing." Much like his idol, Kandhari prefers to convey as much storytelling as possible without dialogue, which he admits "has its place" but is merely one of many tools at his disposal: "With film, we have sound, image, all of these things we can mix together."



KANDHARI SAYS *SISTER MIDNIGHT* IS A "SILENT PICTURE WITH SOUND." WHO NEEDS SOUND WITH PICTURES LIKE THIS? (SEEN HERE: APTE.)

Both Kandhari and Apte are aware that *Sister Midnight* might feel like a curveball for the Fango crowd, but they also hope they'll embrace it since it shares an obvious kinship with a genre that's historically identified with misunderstood monsters. "I don't consider it a horror film, but I do think horror is a beautiful art form," the director assures me. Apte hopes that viewers will take the same risk that so many people took in finally bringing this unique vision to life.

"There are very few makers that take risks," she says. "What Karan's succeeded in doing is making a movie that doesn't have a specific genre. It can't be fit into one box, and that's lovely."

the VIDEO EYE of the SON of DR. CYCLOPS

by Anthony Everitt

BUNNY LAKE IS MISSING (1965)

Back for more, eh? You pretty sluts like to lick up all the slimy grit at the bottom of the print stack, and frankly it's kind of hot. But give me a little space; you're suffocating me. Besides, I could use some room to maneuver, because other than a few paragraphs in an obscure little volume I stole from The Doc's lab as a young mutant, I don't know this one. And yet how this movie starring Laurence Olivier, Keir Dullea and Carol Lynley, with cameos by Noël Coward and The Zombies, flew under my radar is as mystifying as people who say that children with imaginary friends are "normal" and "it's healthy." It must stop, if not simply because it's a hideous abomination, then because it creates confusion. For instance, as an adult how can anyone reasonable take you seriously when you claim that your child is missing? In the satirically indifferent vision of London created by Otto Preminger, it becomes a real sticking point. Even the camera sometimes seems cruelly disinterested in the mother's crisis, noticeably shying away at critical moments and driving forward relentlessly through establishing shots like a self-absorbed, tunnel-visioned commuter. But the photography is beautifully detailed, providing just enough to establish the world of the characters and allowing Preminger to strategically plant key visual information in such a way that keeps the audience guessing till the end. But despite the polished performances and calculated approach, it's also something of a giallo, cautioning us not to put the needs of high-functioning psychotic morons before social convention. As always, the children suffer most.

CAROL LYNLEY AS ANN LAKE. BEHIND HER: NAMELESS, GHASTLY DOLLS.

THE DUNWICH HORROR (1970)

Speaking of inappropriate kinkiness, this is positively the most fun I've seen someone have going into labor with a hybrid interdimensional alien pregnancy. Somebody call Mr. Ron Jeremy – this one's live. It's good that someone corrected Lovecraft's obvious oversight in making Lavinia an inbred, lumpy albino, when he could just as easily have spared the male readers any discomfort and awkwardly written a couple of elderly albino priestesses into the scene instead. And no update would be complete without tossing aside those stuffy pre-war pulp ideas about consent and making her an unwitting participant: this is high art, tailored to modern "liberated" tastes.

Sandra Dee must have been as desperate for a role as this character is for a relationship. Maybe it's just that she's a freshman, but a co-ed who doesn't know what a Mickey is? In 1970? Corman, please. Maybe she's prone to vertigo, since she's remarkably nonplussed for someone who is conveniently going days without any equilibrium after spending one night at a complete stranger's house. Speaking of whom, Wilbur Whateley is walking around pretty naturally in pants for someone with tentacles and eyeballs around the waist and goat legs. He better have something special down there, because upstairs he's kind of your standard smarmy, smug, uncharismatic dweeb. Then again, no amount of try-hard nihilism and intellectualized debauchery is really going to make a guy named "Wilbur" into a counter-culture Byron, is it? Even sadder, after spending most of the movie overcompensating for a lack of parental affection, his amorphous eldritch blasphemy of a brother just swoops in and steals the show anyway.

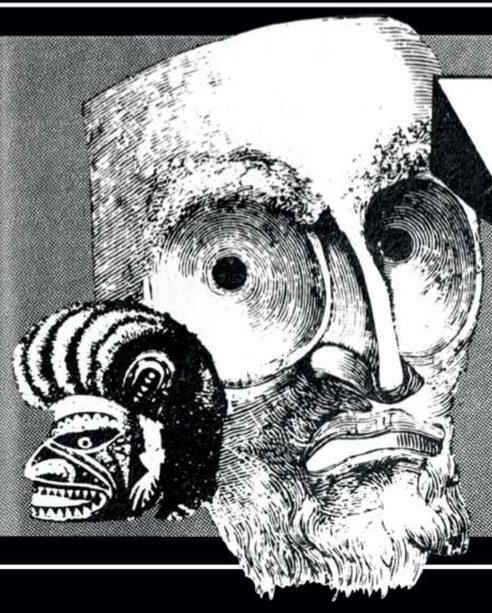
DEAN STOCKWELL AS WILBUR WHATELEY. BELOW, SANDRA DEE (NANCY WAGNER) AND "FRIENDS."

BURIAL GROUND (1981)

What's worse, having a cannibalistic zombie walk in on you having sex, or giving birth to a full-grown, bug-eyed, perverted little person with an uncanny boob fixation? You don't have to answer that, just something to contemplate while watching. Without giving too much away ahead of time, it's obviously a good thing that they didn't cast an actual child in this movie, if for no other reason than to avoid a jail sentence. I suppose picking a deep-voiced man to dub Peter Bark was also a legal requirement, so unfortunately the audience does come away without any severe trauma (which is why it must have been so refreshing for special makeup effects artist Giannetto De Rossi to torture and kill so many real animals on screen for *Cannibal Ferox*.) His zombie creations for this one are memorable as always, some even harkening back to the *Let Sleeping Corpses Lie* look (one of the best zombie films of all time, for those keeping track.) They also must be some of the most industrious, well-equipped, organized zombies ever: one minute they're hacking away at what looks like a cellar door with hatchets, the next they're throwing knives with machine-like precision, even at one point operating a table saw. Real hardscrabble blue-collar stuff.

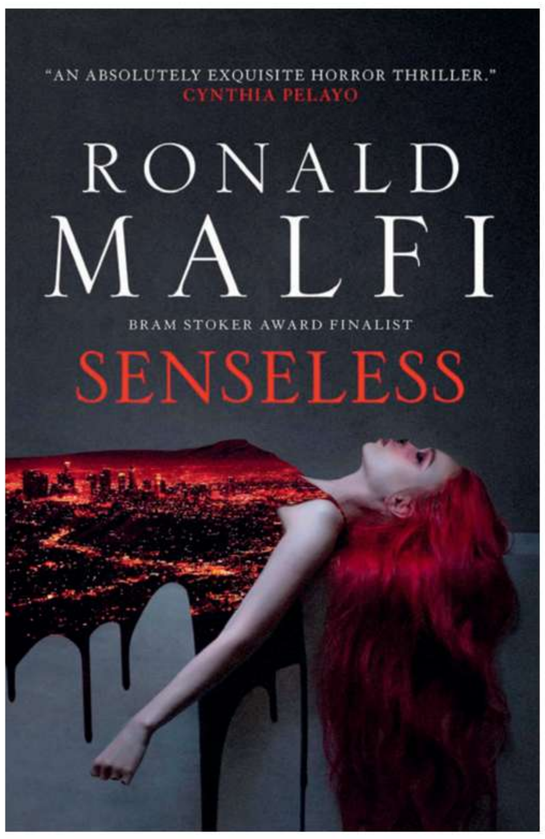
As with all Spaghetti Zombie films it's best not to look too hard for causal connections or coherence. But what it lacks in narrative it surprisingly makes up for in suspense and imagery. In fact, in a lot of ways, for all its characteristic Italian strangeness, this is possibly one of the most Romero-esque I've seen. 💀

ANTONELLA ANTINORI AS LESLIE. ABOVE AND TO THE RIGHT: SOME ZOMBIES.



NIGHTMARE LIBRARY

BY AHLISSA EICHHORN



SENSELESS

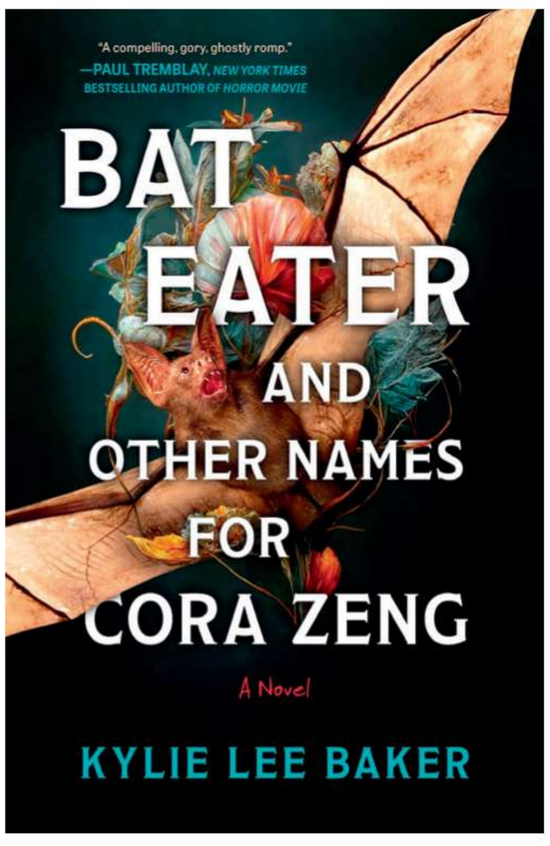
DUE OUT:
4/15/2025

AUTHOR:
Ronald Malfi

PUBLISHER:
Titan Books

Even though the woman's mutilated body bears similar disfigurements to last year's unsolved case, Detective Renney isn't quick to react. It doesn't matter that the body was dumped in the same desert outside of Los Angeles, either. He knows something the other officers don't and plans to keep it that way. In Hollywood, Maureen walks on eggshells around her wealthy new fiancé and his menacing son. In the gutter, Toby flits about like a human fly, enraptured by the rattlesnake woman who bit him in the bar. These three flaying threads wind and weave until they knot up in a tangle of horrifying consequences.

Strategizing suspicion is the key to any good crime story. On top of the characters' growing disquiet, the speculative elements in *Senseless* add another layer of tension, using the power of suggestion twofold. But Malfi is careful about whose head he puts readers in and how much time they spend there. There is no frivolity in the text; every mention is intentional. This sentiment extends to the author's memorable diction. The novel is very much a noir thriller at its core, focusing on the bleakest (and most entertaining) motions of an investigation. Its separate storylines are a study in disorienting audiences and the slow reveal of secrets. It proves no social class is impenetrable to horror. *Senseless* is devoid of safety; its plot can lead anywhere, and its intense characters are capable of anything. Bound by realism, some questions may never get answers, leaving readers in spirited torment.



BAT EATER AND OTHER NAMES FOR CORA ZENG

DUE OUT:
4/29/202

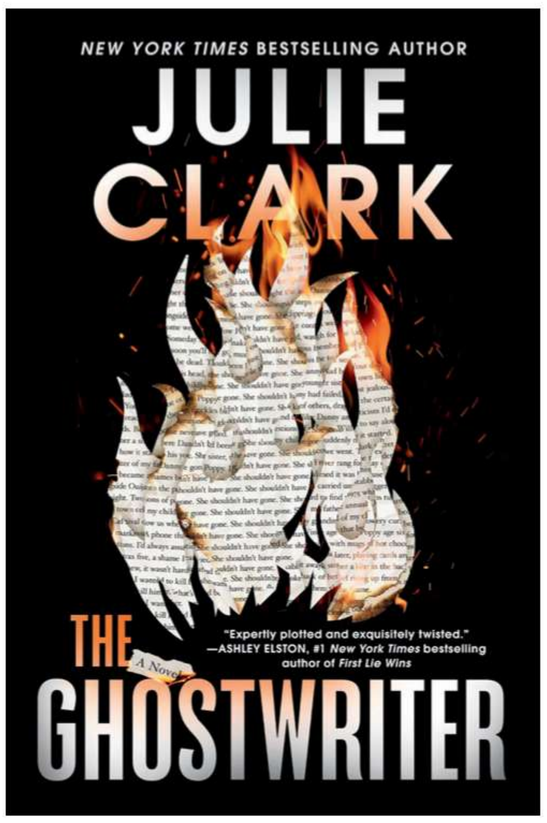
AUTHOR:
Kylie Lee Baker

PUBLISHER:
MIRA

Cora Zeng heard two words from the man who pushed her sister in front of the train: bat eater. Lost and despondent in the months after, she finds work as a crime scene cleaner in Chinatown. Amid the blood and bone fragments she scrubs away, a pattern emerges. Someone is targeting Asian women, eviscerating their bodies and leaving live bats as a sadistic calling card. The approaching Hungry Ghost Festival is the least of Cora's worries with a killer out there. Who can even consider the supernatural world when the real one is just as terrifying? But starving ghosts aren't harmless, as Cora and her coworkers, Harvey and Yiehi, soon find out.

Themes of identity and rampant Sinophobia are Cora's biggest antagonists in *The Bat Eater and Other Names for Cora Zeng*. Her displacement stems from the duality of her heritage and the inability to fully belong to either. Unchecked violence towards the Asian community during the pandemic exacerbates her struggles. She finds a community in crisis when she pushes past her inhibiting fears. The friendships she forms are as humorous as they are harmonizing to the plot. The combination of the supernatural and harsh reality gives the novel fantastic range. Its creeping, shadowy ghosts are a frightening play on Chinese cultural lore, which the novel explores deeply. The story's unpleasant truths about society are symbolized in its goriest sequences. *The Bat Eater* is a conversation that forcibly opens your eyes. The author shows readers many villains, entrusting them to recognize the worst one.

THIS ISSUE OF THE NIGHTMARE LIBRARY GATHERS FOUR KILLER CRIME STORIES.
Ride shotgun with moody detectives, resolute survivors, and hardboiled sleuths as they hunt down the men monsters are made of. You'll find that each killer plays by different rules and realities. Their methods are their own, but all are diabolically cold in their executions.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JULIE CLARK
"Expertly plotted and exquisitely twisted."
—ASHLEY ELSTON, #1 New York Times bestselling author of First Lie Wins
A Novel
THE GHOSTWRITER

THE GHOSTWRITER

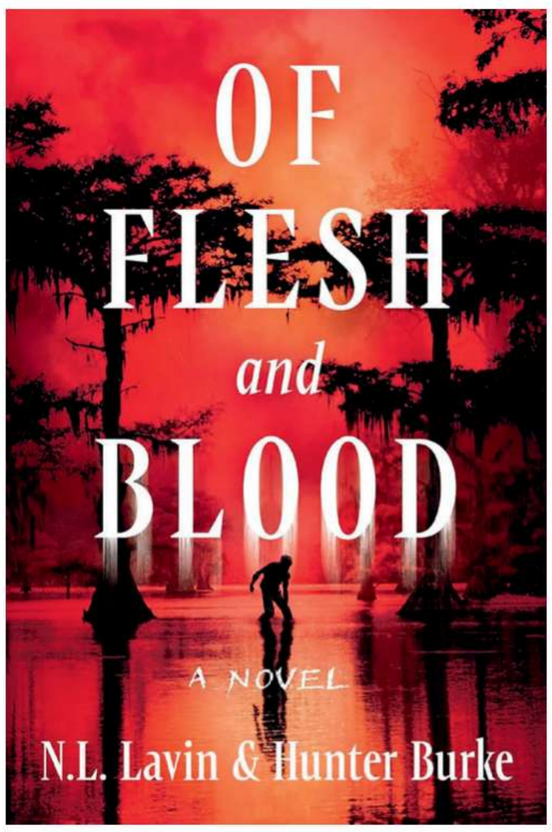
DUE OUT:
6/03/2025

AUTHOR:
Julie Clark

PUBLISHER:
Sourcebooks Landmark

Ghostwriter Olivia Dumont is backed into a corner. She's on the cusp of financial ruin and offered the one job in the world she doesn't want. Famous horror novelist Vincent Taylor wants her to pen his last book, a memoir about the 1975 double homicide of his brother and sister. Her moral compass whirrs at the thought of working with him, the prime suspect of the case. He's also her estranged father, a fact she's kept hidden very well. But she accepts the offer, bracing to relive painful memories and expose dangerous lies to reveal the person responsible for her family's demise.

The hometown setting of *The Ghostwriter* is its most important character. It is the romantic, burdening nostalgia that courses through each person Clark describes. It reveals the devastating effects of the past in clear-cut descriptions. These ambivalent characters are tightlipped and wounded, making them fascinating to observe. True crime readers will appreciate the plot's overall focus on the writing and researching Olivia undertakes. The old diaries and disturbing home video footage she finds enhance the novel's cinematic quality. Its use of flashback narratives compounds the growing distrust and paranoia within Olivia as she ruminates on motives and alibis. Scenes of confrontation and death possess eerie ingenuity that reinforce the onslaught of shocks. Its slow-burn pacing is steady and doesn't leave you starving for excitement. Abound in mind games and chilling revelations, *The Ghostwriter* is a dejected thrill radiating the dark, perverse trademarks of a Fincher film.



OF FLESH AND BLOOD

DUE OUT:
6/10/2025

AUTHOR:
N.L. Lavin & Hunter Burke

PUBLISHER:
Crooked Lane Books

In 2008, a Louisianan serial killer dubbed the Cajun Cannibal murdered and ate the flesh of eight victims. Ten years after his suicide, forensic psychiatrist Dr. Vincent Blackburn starts a case study on the man through a sociopathic lens. He's convinced the killer was afflicted by his own superstitions; a tortured soul controlled by the miswirings of his mind. But professional curiosity soon crumbles into a rabbit hole of obsession as he learns about the local legend his theory hinges upon. Now with similar killings popping up, he risks his credibility and sanity to prove the record of events wrong.

Of Flesh and Blood wants your dedication and demands your attention. Its formatting poses as both case study and confessional. Numerous files, articles, and personal anecdotes act as a vast sprawl of rich exposition to ensure readers feel immersed and informed. No twisted, gut-churning slaying goes without clinical detailing. The authors also excel at humanizing every individual affected by the murders. They relay the messy emotions of survivors' guilt, of unshakeable rage, and the dire need for closure. The story's cryptid angle invites conversations about problematic crime fandoms and conspiracy theorists. It asks where the line is drawn between passion and fixation, between helping and harming. The tone is a healthy balance of delirium and conviction, throwing readers off its trail every few chapters. So, grab your whiteboard and sticky notes; *Of Flesh and Blood* is the perturbing cold-sweat case that unravels you as you crack it.

Contributors' Crypt

Here's where you can follow some of our contributors on Instagram. Be polite!

Meredith Borders ..... @mereborders
Ryan Carr ..... @ryansamuelcarr
Adam Cesare ..... @adamcesare
BJ Colangelo ..... @bjcolangelo
Barbara Crampton .. @barbaracrampton
Ahlissa Eichhorn .. @hauntedbydeadlines
Anthony Everitt ..@deathmetaltypewriter
Isaac Feldberg ..... @ijfeldberg
Stephen Graham Jones ..... @stephengrahamjones
Carolyn Mauricette ..... @cemo25
Rebekah McKendry .@rebekahmckendry
Yulissa Morales ..... @_yulissamora
Richard Newby ..... @rnewb
Amber T ..... @hornbloodfire
Rocco T. Thompson ..@rosemarys_gayby
Tony Timpone ..... @timponetony
Matt Ryan Tobin ..... @mattryan
Eric Vespe ..... @ericvespe

CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

Scott: Thanks for one more turn around the wheel. And may we meet again, in the clearing at the end of the path. -m-

Meet me at the Overlook Film Festival in New Orleans: Beignets, Baphomet, and Brian Collins Karaoke!

Spank: Thanks for always being the rock <3

Sometimes I would do my homework in the morning on the bus to school. I fear some showrunners never got out of that habit.

Check out the Spooky Doings podcast. Improviser & trivia host Rick Guzman conducts interviews & talks about horror with guests. Available on Apple, Spotify & Podbean.

Congrats CC & CP on welcoming baby M&M into the world! I can't wait to meet her and watch so many Elvira marathons together.

I finally started reading The Dark Tower series and I wish I could talk to you about it as I work my way through. We all miss you.

Every time you get your horror news from FANGORIA.com an Angel smiles.

Got me again (#owned). Hopefully you're done surprising me after this issue, Wampler. Get some rest, for fuck's sake. - P

Shout-out to Jason Kauzlarich for making each page of FANGORIA look AMAZING over 15 issues and 31 covers! You're an incredible creative director & husband! - AV

Listen to Certified Forgotten, the best podcast that recommends horror movies with 10-or-less reviews on Rotten Tomatoes!

Billy the Puppet is a psyop.

Criterion we need Godzilla Heisei and Millennium era sets please! - Angel O.

Looking for a new podcast? Feed your need for gastro horror with Final Girls Feast! finalgirlsfeast.com

Haunted Tales of the Dark & Halloween/Horror Resource Guide at Patreon.com/BeyondHalloween

The Waffle Press Movie Podcast is a professionally unprofessional podcast focusing on the past, present and future of cinema. Hosted by Diego Crespo, Gene Aversa, Max Deering, and Matt Guringo, Follow on Twitter @TheWafflePress

Does anyone have the Count Fangor mask that was for sale in FANGORIA vol 1 issue 8? DM us if you do!

Miss ya dude

Things to Come

It's a sequel kinda summer, with MEGAN 2.0, 28 YEARS LATER, and I CONTINUE TO KNOW WHAT YOU DID TWO DOZEN SUMMERS AGO or whatever they're calling it. Don't worry, though – it's not all sequels! We've also got a HELLRAISER video game on deck and Macon Blair's TOXIC AVENGER is finally seeing the light of day! (Hm. I'm sure there's gonna be some original horror in there too, somewhere...)

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